A Quarterly of New Literature

ACCENT

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Empson's Poetry

CLEANTH BROOKS:
Empson's Criticism

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ACCENT

A QUARTERLY OF NEW LITERATURE

Volume 4, Number 4 Summer, 1944

RICHARD EBERHART:
Empson's Poetry

"Delicate goose-step of penned scorpions"

Coincidence dictated that I should be up at Cambridge coterminously with Empson, hence that I should be intimately aware of his poetic career from its inception. At twenty-one Empson was, with Hugh Sykes-Davies, editing *Experiment,* the livelier of the two literary magazines which mushroomed among the undergraduates, and was also contributing to the other, *New Venture.*

In the first number of Experiment appeared three of Empson's poems: "Letter," beginning "You were amused to find you too could fear / 'The eternal silence of the infinite spaces'" (entitled "Letter I" in the 1935 edition of his first *Poems,* from Chatto and Windus); the amusing, startling "Part of Mandevil's Travels" (likewise republished in the book); and "Disillusion with Metaphysics" (later printed as "Dissatisfaction with Metaphysics" with variations in two lines). George Reavy, J. Bronowski, E. E. Phare, Hugh Sykes, and T. H. White were other original contributors. (Miss Phare, who was later to write one of the first books on Hopkins, here contributed an article on Valéry and Hopkins.)

The second number of *Experiment* contained two other Empson poems, "Camping Out," a brain-tickler which exercised many hours of drawing-room discussion in Cambridge, and withheld its ultimate ambiguous secrets for years, and "The Earth Has Shrunk in the Wash." The same issue offered the prose

"Ambiguity in Shakespeare's Sonnet XVI," which began those extraordinary microscopic and expanding views of grammatical context in poetry which were elaborated to make *Seven Types of Ambiguity*. The pupil of I. A. Richards inflamed the imagination of his master: Richards understood instantly Empson's value. Although the chief indebtedness in the association of the two Magdalene men since 1927 has been that of Empson to Richards—the prefatory note to *Seven Types* includes the author's statement that Richards "told me to write this essay"—, the master exploited the fineness of mind of the pupil, wise to see in Empson's beginning criticism a nice adjunct to and a different end from his own. And as late as 1940, he wrote an appreciation of Empson in *Furioso*. In this same second number of *Experiment* appeared my "Request for Offering." I, too, in a less direct manner, was to fall under the spell of the master; to him I owed, and owe, heady allegiance for the sensitivity he evinced in every manifestation of poetry one exhibited.

Experiment began in November, 1928, and ended in October, 1930, with its sixth number. Empson made contributions to all the remaining numbers: prose on Herbert's "The Sacrifice" and on T. S. Eliot, and five additional poems, all of which have re-appeared in his later volumes of verse, some with alterations. Empson also published a good many poems at this time in *The Cambridge Review*.

The scholar may enjoy noting how Empson worked alterations as I quote first the periodical version (1928) of "Relativity," then the 1935 book version with its new title, "The World's End":

RELATIVITY

"Fly to the world's end, dear.
Plumb space through stars.
Let final chasm, topless cliffs, appear;
What tyrant there our variance debars?

Live there, your back freezing to All's Wall,
Or brinked by chasm that all chasms bounds;
There, with two times at choice, all plots forestall,
Or, no time backing you, what force surrounds?"

Alas, now hope for freedom, no bars bend;
Space is like earth, rounded, a padded cell.
Plumb the stars' depth, your head bumps you behind;
Blind Satan's voice rattled the whole of Hell.

On air, on cushions, what's a file worth
To pierce that chasm lies so snugly curled?
Each tangent plain touches one top of earth;
Each point in one direction ends the world.

Apple of knowledge and forgetful mere
From Tantalus too differential bend;
The world's end is here.
This place's curvature precludes its end.

THE WORLD'S END

"Fly with me then to all's and the world's end
And plumb for safety down the gap of stars;
Let the last gulf or topless cliff befriend,
What tyrant there our variance debars?"

Alas, how hope for freedom, no bars bind;
Space is like earth, rounded, a padded cell;
Plumb the stars' depth, your lead bumps you behind;
Blind Satan's voice rattled the whole of Hell.

On cushioned air what is such metal worth
To pierce to the gulf that lies so snugly curled?
Each tangent plain touches one top of earth,
Each point in one direction ends the world.

Apple of knowledge and forgetful mere
From Tantalus too differential bend.
The shadow clings. The world's end is here.
This place's curvature precludes its end.

It has always seemed a pity to me that several excellent poems, of the profusion of work Empson produced in a relatively short time, have been omitted from his books. Three poems in particular deserve to be more available than they are in the files of *The Cambridge Review* and in the anthology *Cambridge Poetry 1929*. Conditions are such that I am unable to credit *The Cambridge Review* with thanks for the liberty of quotation, but it is hoped that the editors would have no objection to my quoting these three poems at this time.

The first poem, "Une Brioche Pour Cerbere," employs Empson's sly wit, the first four lines reminding one in tone of "Rolling the Lawn" with its unforgettable "Holding the Holy Roller at the slope / (The English symbol, not the Texas Pope)":

UNE BRIOCHE POUR CERBERE

Tom nods. No senior angels see or grapple.
Tom enters Eden, nodding, the back way.
Borrows from Adam, and then eats, the Apple.
"Thank you so much for a delightful stay."

If it works, it works. Nod to the man at the door.
Nor heed what gulfs, nor how much the earth between.
If radio light, from the last sphere before
Outer dark, reflects you, you are seen.

So can the poles look in each other's eyes.
Within that charmed last vacuate of air
Who is my neighbor, and who safe from spies?
Earth sees me nod. No, nothing to declare.

Porter, report not my heart contraband.
Of you, you primitive culture, stored flame,

I scotophile, friend by short cut, had planned
To view the rites, no high priest first to tame.

My dear, my earth how offer me your halls?
Grant me your Eden, I see Eden Station,
Whence stationed gauge you whose full scale appals
And all whose porters would ask explanation?

The next poem shows a spirit of gayety even then characteristic of the author: unbridled, but well-reined, gayety of word-play:

NEW WORLD BISTRES

The darkest is near dawn, we almost butter.
The churning is fixed now; we have "gone to sleep"
In body, and become a living pat;
It is then that the arm churning it aches most
And dares least pause against the ceaseless turning.
I am sure he will soon stumble upon the gift,
Maypole his membranes, Ciro be his eyes,
A secret order, assumptive, distillation;
Fitting together it will be won and seem nothing.
Oh socketed too deep, Oh more than tears,
Than any faint unhurrying resurrection,
That ever rain, manna (the manner born,
The man born of the manor, and that bourne
Turn Cardinal Bourne. The Palace, Washing Day.
Lux and her cherub, here is a nymph handy.)
Those glacial, dried soap film, shacken packets,
That rain of hushing, elixir-centred sequins,
Falling through space, gracious, a feather swaying.
Rising, triumphant, hooter, whine, mosquito,
The separator, pausing by violent movement
Stands at the even not skimming of stood cream.
Moss can be grown on tops. Gyroscopes
Holed with grim jewels set in resounding brass
Rector and tractor of earth's vertiges,
Claw, widely patented, pierce, sinking,
Armoured resentience their lead fathom line.

The third poem, in loaded gear, follows:

INSOMNIA

Satan when ultimate chaos he would fly
battered at random by hot dry wet cold
(Probably nor Probability
his view the total cauldron of a sky
Milton nor Brownian hesitance foretold)
One purposed whirlwind helpless whole hours could hold.

From Bottomless Pit's bottom originally
who durst his sail-broad vans unfold
thence till (God's help the rival gust came by)
Hell seemed as Heaven undistinguishedly high

Through pudding still unstirred of Anarch Old
had sunk yet, down for ever, by one blast controlled.

So to the baked Chaos that am I,
Potion whose cooling boat grates crystal shoaled
gears on a mixed bank allotropically
untempered patchwork to the naked eye,
one hour the snow's one pattern, and I bold,
gale knew its point all night, though nine through compass rolled.

Though large charged carpet units insulately
alone processed, each from the former's mould,
each further angle could new shades supply,
roads every earlier opposite to tie
in single type Hell's very warders scrolled,
Nine intersterile species nightmare's full Nine were foaled.

There is another early poem, never reprinted since its appearance in *Experiment* No. 4 (November, 1929), which has stuck in my mind and calls for comment now:

UFA NIGHTMARE

Gramophony. Telephony. Photophony.
The mighty handles and persensate dials
That rule my liner multi-implicate
Ring round, Stonehenge, a wide cold concrete room.
(I run the row from A to O, and so
—To and fro; periscope, radio—
We know which way we go)
"If we can reach the point
Before the tide, there is another style.
I shall checkmate, given the whole board;
Juggling the very tittles in the air
Shall counterblast the dreadnought machiner."
(Scamper, scamper, scamper.
Huge elbows tumble towards chaos.
Lurch, sag, and hesitation of the dials.)
A tiny figure, seated in the engine,
Weevil clicking in a hollow oak,
Pedals, parched with the fear of solitude.

Here was a remarkable poem, timely then as it still is. Its title, wickedly foreign, excused its oddity, let one wander in the dream, yet there was something scientifically precise about it. It had wit; originality in every line; very subtle music; drama; lines that strode across the years, summing up the age; and, as in most of Empson's poetry, a strange quality of hiding the meanings, hoarding its strength, elusively secreting delicacies of perception.

The first line was novel. One had not heard a poem start that way. The license, however, was not excessive: something balanced about the three terms, which you never knew whether you were pronouncing properly, a fact giving the more pleasure—you wondered whether the author calculated even on that, or whether it was merely your stupidity—, and there was the other level of meaning in the sound of "phony." Line two went off with a great swish, quite

released from the first, or even a Miltonic dignity. One had the tendency in Empson to enjoy single successful lines, savoring them as they were, out of context with their grammatical relation to previous or succeeding lines; and this was one. What his "liner" was one did not yet know; "multi-implicate" was new; "Stonehenge" was thrown up in your face. You finally derived pleasure from using this last as a verb, certainly a novel notion, but you could take it as a noun singly, giving a different and yet quite similar suggestion to "wide cold concrete room." Contrast of the static with the dynamic, ancient simplicity with modern complexity. Then the musical lilt of the next three parenthetical lines, how accurately the music controlled! I recall a vague feeling of similarity with Hart Crane here, the only place in Empson, quite evanescent, probably wrong. "We know which way we go" struck me as masterful, for I never knew in those years which way I was going—would have loved to know—but that is going out of context again.

Now supposedly the technician is speaking. Something dramatic and opulent in the first two lines. Switch to a chess image; odd, but provocative, keeping it from being too nautical. "Juggling the very tittles in the air" was a ravishing line. It was what the greatest critical insight always did: it lifted you up high into the rarified air of exquisite contemplation. I always thought of it as what Empson as poet and critic was doing. Again that nice contrast between two lines, in the heavier consonantal values of the "counterblast." "Juggling the very tittles in the air" was delicious! Juggling them, all most delicate thought or perception would finally overcome the heavy opposing weight of world or matter, put all in order.

The scamper motif was transitional, referred back to the first line. The huge elbows tumbling toward chaos went on telling the story, commenting on machinery. "Lurch, sag, and hesitation of the dials" was another line which stuck in my head. As a single line it was magnificent. You could take it all together, or you could draw it out. The line following, "A tiny figure, seated in the engine," stuck, too, became for me universal, a universal picture of modern man. The ensuing shift to the weevil "clicking" (strange relation to mechanics) in the hollow oak (even the weevil endowed with some mechanical similarity to man) was justified in the same way the chess image had been. And then the poem ended subtly with another change of tone, stress, grammar, seemingly awkwardly, and you could take it more ways than one. The whole poem was a compact piece, in which a various new world was ready to expand in the mind, baring images not violently opposed to the world as it was.

II

In December, 1939, when he had come to America from Japan but before he had returned to England, Empson told me that he considered his early poems in the nature of experiments, trial balloons or something of the sort. He was glad his criticism had "caught on" in this country, but was not surprised that his poetry had not. He said he had written some verse in the East, but not

much. I recall prophesying that it would take America a decade to discover and estimate Empson as a poet, and I was short of the mark. It may be permissible now to discuss the nature of his contribution to poetry, in his early phase, before considering his second book.

First, let it be said that during my time at Cambridge, 1927-1929, Empson was considered a startling poet by the learned. His mind had early been weighted on the mathematical and scientific side; he was rather Shelleyan in that, as he was in his exodus from Cambridge, for reasons as interesting to this century as were those of Shelley to his. Empson was brisk, quick-moving, florid. When he took the Tripos in June, 1929, they had had to give him not only a First, but a starred First, a rare distinction. No American, I understand, has ever won one.

In Cambridge everybody talked about Empson's poetry. His poems challenged the mind, seemed to defy the understanding; they amused and they enchanted; and even then they afforded a kind of parlor game, whiling away lively hours of puzzlement at many a dinner party. The shock and impact of this new kind of poetry were so considerable that people at that time had no way to measure its contemporary or its timeless value. They were amazed by it. Eliot was already enthroned. The "Oxford Group" had not yet got fully under way. And Cambridge was buzzing with activity.

Empson had the power to shock. Old dowagers who had known Meredith (I remember one), or young girls from Girton who knew their Hopkins, or dons who talked much but did not know where they stood, were stumped, balked and rebuked by "Camping Out," which began: "And now she cleans her teeth into the lake." You could read the poem twenty times and not know what it meant! You could read it so many ways! You could argue about the grammar by the hour! And as for the meaning, did Richards himself know for sure? It was all so intellectual, so exciting, so very Cantabridgean.

This is not the place to dwell upon the course of the poet's activities. Had Richards not gone to China, where he was for one thing preparing his book on Mencius, it is questionable whether Empson would have gone to the East. The reserve of his mind was such that the *Poems,* his first volume, did not appear until 1935. This seems significant. Meanwhile, the "Auden gang" had raged on the world, the world was listening to them, there was a bewilderment of opinion as to the relative merits and demerits of each, they had their "little mag," their anthologies. The new signatures were on the wing. The excavations into sociological reality made by Auden constituted an enlargement of English poetry from its immediate past; one thought of the service of enlargement made earlier by Browning. (Or, better, one did not think of it; Browning was unmentionable.) I have said an enlargement, not a deepening. And if Oxford had seemed to produce something thought of at this time as a school, the Cambridge writers maintained their lack of group consciousness, their strict individuality and, in Empson's case, their austere meticulous distance. The Oxford writers went out to woo the world; Empson, as an epitome of Cambridge attitudes, remained aloof, in a kind of scientific maze of his own

words. Let the world come to his poetry when it would. His modesty coupled with his wit might have convinced him it was not a world-shake anyway. But Empson, whatever initially caused his poetry, was typically a Cambridge writer: the passion for meticulous truth, the scientific attitudes intruding on poetry to rule out anything "romantic," the care for minute perceptions communicated in a subtle way, the daring exercise of new grammatical possibilities of English, under the aegis of a master, these made for a poetry not in the old style of the humanities, but in a new, a sharper, a keener but also perhaps a less profound mode.

Some points in favor of the early poems follow. Not only did Empson load every rift with ore; he loaded them with more than one kind of substance. The compression of his images and the conscious ambiguity of his grammar, when he exercised both, were salutary in that they insured the reader against the ragged or the loose. A poem of his would not yield its meanings immediately, but one would be well paid in time: a sign of good poetry. It was a poetry of concealed riches. Another point was in the seemingly almost perfect control of the use of language. There was no excess in these poems. If they were bizarre, they did not offend; if witty, they did not degenerate into foolishness; if elaborate, they did not invite careless attention; if puzzling, they enchanted one with the answers. They expressed a certain aristocracy of intellect, but were not aloof from fundamental propositions. They constituted a microcosm of realities.

Against Empson's early poetry charges could be leveled and were indeed applied. This poetry was not "great" because it was not "universal." There was no world-view, no philosophic, inclusive view behind the poems. It was repeatedly said that they were too purely intellectual: the compliment was turned into an adverse criticism. His look was too rarified for human nature's daily food. On an old measuring rod of the simple, the sensuous, and the passionate, these poems could not rate high; they were not simple, they were not sensuous, and their passion was limited to the intellectual kind. Others held that the poems did not cohere; these found disorder who had not imagination enough to divine the niceties of a new order. Others held that when wit dominates to the extent it did in these poems, the sign was of a certain smallness; the great poets all had a nobility, a depth, a seriousness lacking in this work. And still others believed that a religious consciousness, traditionally based, in one mode or another, such as had given Eliot "Ash Wednesday," was necessary for the scale of importance which these poems did not touch.

For perfection of form, precision of statement, and delight of language, some of Empson's early poems will last as long as any of those of his contemporaries. Richards, who may be excused the bias of a learned teacher upon a learned pupil, thinks Empson is the best of the lot. Be that as it may. It is probable that the early poems constitute minor poetry of a high order. That in itself is very considerable achievement. Some are satisfied with a few poems of Marvell; some would be satisfied with one. Values notoriously change; a decade or two hence those now considered major may be considered minor, and vice versa.

It is conceivable that a few of Empson's poems may be read ages hence.

Some single lines which impressed themselves upon me for a decade I shall quote. They became part of the fullness of one's consciousness. "How small a chink lets in how dire a foe." "Space is like earth, rounded, a padded cell." "Blind Satan's voice rattled the whole of Hell." "Each point in one direction ends a world." "Delicate goose-step of penned scorpions." "Gods cool in turn, by the sun long outlasted." "I approve, myself, dark spaces between stars." "It is the pain, it is the pain, endures." " 'Twixt devil and deep sea, man hacks his caves." "Solomon's gems, white vistas, preserved kings." "Law makes long spokes of the short stakes of men." "One daily tortures the poor Christ anew." "The laughing god born of a startling answer." "All those large dreams by which men long live well / Are magic-lanterned on the smoke of Hell." "The beam of Justice as in doubt for ever / Hung like a Zeppelin over London river."

III

Before going on to consider Empson's second book, *The Gathering Storm,* we may take a poem of his from the first book, which also appeared in *New Signatures,* and work it as a good specimen of Empson's poetical powers.

THIS LAST PAIN

This last pain for the damned the Fathers found:
"They knew the bliss with which they were not crowned."
Such, but on earth, let me fortell,
Is all, of heaven or of hell.

Man, as the prying housemaid of the soul,
May know her happiness by eye to hole:
He's safe; the key is lost; he knows
Door will not open, nor hole close.

"What is conceivable can happen too,"
Said Wittgenstein, who had not dreamt of you;
But wisely; if we worked it long
We should forget where it was wrong:

Those thorns are crowns which, woven into knots,
Crackle under and soon boil fool's pots;
And no man's watching, wise and long,
Would ever stare them into song.

Thorns burn to a consistent ash, like man;
A splendid cleanser for the frying-pan:
And those who leap from pan to fire
Should this brave opposite admire.

All those large dreams by which men long live well
Are magic-lanterned on the smoke of hell;
This then is real, I have implied,
A painted, small, transparent slide.

These the inventive can hand-paint at leisure,
Or most emporia would stock our measure;
And feasting in their dappled shade
We should forget how they were made.

Feign then what's be a decent tact believed
And act that state is only so conceived,
And build an edifice of form
For house where phantoms may keep warm.

Imagine, then, by miracle, with me,
(Ambiguous gifts, as what gods give must be)
What could not possibly be there,
And learn a style from a despair.

Line 1. The question to be asked about this line is: do we need to know what theology is intended? Also, do we need to know about the author's private attitude to religion to determine what he may want to suggest by Fathers?

2. Supposedly they are in hell; supposedly they knew the bliss before they were damned. Paolo and Francesca?

3. "Such" refers to the bliss. Empson would be the one to dilate on his use of "but" here. If bliss occurs on earth, that is all there is to heaven and hell. "let me foretell" rings ominously.

4. The comma could be left out after "all." Used, it emphasizes "all," makes it substantial, a universal, and affects a nuance in the rhythm of the line. The comma also throws a slight stress on the word "or," which it otherwise might not have, lending a slightly different connotation than if "heaven" and "hell" were equally stressed, with "or" merely as a link. Bliss we might have expected to have been all of heaven; now we are invited to the notion that it would be "all" of hell. He can be using both terms in a generic, and also in a "worldly" way, simultaneously. It may be illogical to suppose there could be any bliss in hell; yet this may be taken in the sense of the pleasures of worldly sin. The point of the quatrain is, however, that they had known bliss in this life; that was final, whatever would happen to them upon damnation after death.

The first quatrain is firm in tone, dignified, serious, controlled, stating the problem. The musical quality of the verse is apparent. Low-register rhyme words are employed for damnation, "found," "crowned." When he makes a dictum, the poet uses higher-register rhyme words, "foretell," "hell," as appropriate to the sense of bliss.

5-8. These four lines can be considered together, the sense running on. Recall "the damp souls of housemaids." Housemaids need not be prying, but are so posited for purposes of the comparison. We must expect here a kind of Empsonian wit available in other poems of his. The tone, therefore, is made lighter than in the first quatrain; a kind of metaphysical joke is supplied. But the meaning behind the levity is equal to that in the first quatrain; the basis is agnosticism, astringently intellectualized. Man may know the happiness of the

soul as a prying housemaid might look through a keyhole. The use of "to hole" as an infinitive is a liberty taken with grammatical oddity which is characteristic of Empson: but it comes off. But, again, the words are ambiguous; if "hole" is taken as a noun, a less metaphysical, more straightforward possibility will pertain: you are getting somewhere. Maybe "the key *is* lost." This is all rather funny. At any rate, man is safe; he knows the door of the soul will not open, therefore he can go on looking through it; the keyhole will not close, so that he can go on contemplating. There is a smirk to the passage, which is both a criticism of and a satire upon bliss, a criticism and satire upon man contemplating his own soul.

9-12. Perhaps the key is not lost. Empson had watched Wittgenstein walk through the streets of Cambridge. The sentence (I have not looked it up in the *Tractatus*) is pompous. "But wisely" suggests the egocentric nature of the philosopher (or of the author); he may be looking through a keyhole, but certainly he is not looking at us. The rest of the quatrain speaks common sense, which is, however, too often forgotten in such matters as these: it doesn't do any good to ponder too long: you can see things at a glance with greater clarity than through prolonged study, sometimes.

13-16. These begin to bind together the foregoing information. Some changes were made in the grammar of lines 13, 14. You can play with the idea of the crown of thorns here. The negative statement is at least affirmative!

17-20. These four lines were added to the original version. The teacher is at the board with his pointer.

21-24. The first two lines are the most compelling of the poem. They weigh upon the memory. The rhythm recalls lines 13, 14 of Shakespeare's Sonnet 129:

> All this the world well knows yet none knows well,
> To shun the heaven that leads men to (this) hell.

Empson does not go so far as this last line of Shakespeare, yet he has implied a similar attitude in the poem up to this point. The large dreams are magic-lanterned on the smoke of hell. The smoke of hell may justify the boiling pot, although not only fools go to hell. "Magic-lanterned" gives a tone of artifice to the large dreams, seen as pictures (through the keyhole?) on or in smoke which itself is shifting by nature. But magical, too.

In lines 9-16 low-register rhyme words were employed; now, as in lines 3-4, when the poet offers his dictum, higher-register rhyme sounds are used. The slide, the keyhole, the membrane through which reality is perceived seems to be called the final reality, arbiter of the knower and the known.

25-28. "Most" was substituted for "all" in line 2, a musical loss, I feel. Here the will seems to be given the initiating power; else a great prince lies in prisons he did not build. Subjectivity is not easily lost. The inventive mind can make its own pictures of heaven and hell. Agnosticism again; or at least no acceptance of orthodox dogma; and at most, skepticism. Empson, or you, or I, can feast in a Marvellian dappled shade if we like, forgetful in our own wish.

29-32. This begins the resolution of the poem. Keep up the pretense for

what it is worth. There is delicate self-abnegation here, grave reticence, although they may carry a strong undertone of recognition of the futility of the position—yet there is some pleasue in it.

33-36. Higher-register rhyme sounds are used to round off the whole proposition. It is the complete skeptic who can and must imagine miracles. The poem is so good that one wonders why it might not be enjoyed in 2044. But see Empson's note to the poem; a reader may read more into it than was intended. "The idea of the poem is that human nature can conceive divine states which it cannot attain."

IV

In 1940, five years after the first volume, appeared *The Gathering Storm,* from Faber's. We might begin with the notes. Again he has supplied these, this time in greater abundance, and in themselves they constitute occasional prose of remarkable nicety. The note to "Bacchus" is reprinted intact, with one sentence tidied up: *"Glancer:* she made eyes at both opposites at once" becomes "Glancer: she looked both ways and wanted heaven as real as earth." Indeed, the total new note to "Bacchus," which goes on for about six pages, is a mine of Empsoniana. He is as good on his own poem as he can be on any poem, approaches it with as avid a disinterest, and divulges what minutiae his critical acumen deems sufficient. He does the critic's job for him. This is bound up in the notion that "many people (like myself) prefer to read poetry mixed with prose; it gives you more to go by; the conventions of poetry have been getting far off from normal life, so that to have a prose bridge makes reading poetry seem more natural." The idea gives on to a deeper apology for his poems: "But partly they are meant to be like answers to a crossword puzzle; a sort of puzzle interest is part of the pleasure that you are meant to get from the verse, and that I get myself when I go back to it." The earlier poems seem to me to come more closely under this concept than the later ones, which are not as difficult as those, excepting that "Bacchus," now stretched out to seven stanzas, remains fascinatingly difficult. His "clotted kind of poetry" does not actually have the clots of the earlier work. Nobody could improve on his notes; one could only quibble here or there. So there is nothing to say on this score, and they are recommended to the reader entire. You could read the new poems without the notes; or you could read the notes without the poems, if only to savor the exegetical Empson mind.

The poems in the second book take in a wider range of experience (China principally); they maintain his near-genius for precision; they bear the undeniable look and stamp of his other poems, are on the whole less ambiguous, become merrier and gayer in tone, and they achieve a break-down of his style, towards the end, into what seems to be a newer style, but this is not as masterful as the old. The density of sense is the same; the poet writes with authority and charm; yet the adverse criticisms heretofore mentioned stay, and the favorable notations are given again. There has been no profound change in the nature

of his thinking; this volume is a continuance of the first, rather than a new departure.

"Your Teeth Are Ivory Towers" regales us with the witty rhymes, "Ba," "Pa," and "Ha," which only Empson could achieve. He likes the three-line stanza, which he employed so successfully before. The poem is marred for me, however, by two phrases, "only the child" and "we must deliberate," which echo directly Auden in "Another Time."

"Aubade" is a telling poem. Note the plainness, the directness of it in comparison with earlier poems. He says what he says. Note also the reluctance to part with the three-line stanza, here interspersed.

"Four Legs, Two Legs, Three Legs" returns nearly to the difficulty of the early work, but is easier to comprehend than, say, "Camping Out." It seems revealing that Empson should take a "Reflection from Rochester." He would not reflect from Wordsworth (cf. the sally in "New World Bistres.") He is further revealed, dated, savored, in a "Reflection from Anita Loos."

Empson earlier dignified the villanelle form with serious import in the two excellent pieces beginning, "It is the pain, it is the pain, endures" and "Twixt devil and deep sea, man hacks his caves." We are now given another equal to these, the beautiful poem entitled "Missing Dates," beginning "Slowly the poison the whole blood stream fills." In addition to this masterful line, a second of equal single power is "The waste remains, the waste remains and kills." These add to the universality of utterance I claimed for Empson above. "The fat is in the pyre, boy, waiting for the end," from "Just a Smack at Auden," in his rollicking vein, will not soon be forgotten. The cleverness of the satirical monotony with which he builds up his rhymes on the word "end" in this poem deserves mention: a cutting and a cunning imitation and devitalization.

Nothing is more characteristic of his funds of abstruse knowledge than the matter of the liver fluke in the poem "China." "That the thing can play these tricks without having any structure at all is what is so frightening; it is like demoniacal possession."

In the last poem, "Autumn on Nan-Yueh," Empson cuts loose from compression and lets his words fly with an ease and brilliancy unparalleled in his other work, although you may think the poem is not serious enough. He writes with the sheerest pleasure, making perfect strokes ("We do not fly when we are clay. / We hope to fly when we are dust." Or "And all styles can come down to noise") with rapid energy forming the most readable verse, seemingly informal and off-hand, yet composed in a strict but stately measure recalling the eighteenth century. If this is the stylistic way out of his formerly tortured verse, we can ask for more, even if we reproach him a bit for confiding his matter to the architecture of an old verse form rather than beating out something new to him and new to us. Although one line, "Excuses, consequences, signs" sounds of Pope, "the heat-mists" of his vision drive the words into strongly original ways, and the pleasure of reading is the pleasure of reading the best kind of light verse, a heady pleasure. "I hope the gaiety of the thing comes through."

CLEANTH BROOKS:

Empson's Criticism

Among those who are much interested in modern poetry, and especially in modern criticism, William Empson has already become a legend. With the legend this paper will have very little to do, though I have profound respect for the brilliance of mind and personality which generated it. But the qualifications of the legend—or, for all I know, expansions of it—may best be left in the hands of those who knew Empson personally—who were with him in Cambridge or in China or met him when he was in this country a few years ago. This paper limits itself to his writings where there is, in truth, God's plenty—to agree with, quarrel with, and, all in all, to marvel over.

Yet, it may be just as well to begin with a brief biographical note of my own. I read Empson's *Seven Types of Ambiguity* for the first time in 1938, though I had known of him vaguely as the brilliant pupil and disciple of I. A. Richards. But I came to my reading of him with a head full of Richards—I must have read the *Principles of Literary Criticism* through fifteen times in the early 'thirties—and after R. P. Warren and I had tried, in a couple of textbooks, to work out some analytical methods for discussing poetry. If such a background was calculated to temper somewhat the shock which a reading of the *Seven Types* earlier might have been expected to produce, yet it did dispose one to be impressed all the more by the sheer brilliance of commentary and the fecundity of critical resourcefulness which are displayed in that book.

It was most impressive, for example, to come upon an analysis of Keats' "Ode to Melancholy" *after* you had struggled with an analysis of it yourself and had become aware of some of its difficulties and some of its subtleties. It was a surprise and a delight to find that Empson had also discovered—and years earlier—that Herbert's "The Sacrifice" was his masterpiece, and that Empson had penetrated the poem and consolidated gains while you yourself were still content with tentative explorations.

I followed a reading of the *Seven Types* the next year with Empson's *English Pastoral Poetry,* and found there all the development which one would expect on the basis of the somewhat chaotic earlier book. Again there was the brilliant performance, this time fitted into a more solid framework and reflected in a more mature and powerful prose. The second book, of course, is implicit in the first; and one may go on to observe that the second implies at least a dozen further books. If I shall have less to say about the *Pastoral Poetry* here than about the *Seven Types,* it is because the *Pastoral Poetry* is the more final and leaves one little to do other than to record his admiration. The chapters on the Elizabethan double plot, on *The Beggar's Opera,* and on Lewis Carroll's Alice are superb; and even one of the weaker chapters, that on Milton, for example, is filled with insights which any critic could be proud to dilute

into a book. But I take it that the readers of Accent need no stimulus to read Empson for themselves and no arguments to prove his solid merit.

But the implications of Empson's achievement may bear a little comment and underlining. For it is possible that emphasis on his special approach—which Empson does not claim to have invented*—may in itself distract attention from what is finally more important in his criticism.

The key to the significance of what Empson has been doing is to be found in a statement made by Empson in his first book: "Some readers of this chapter, I should like to believe, will have shared the excitement with which it was written, will have felt that it casts a new light on the very nature of language, and must either be all nonsense or very startling and new." The statement is not egotistical boasting; it is not the case of the infant critic's petulantly demanding either full agreement or outright rejection.

If indeed Empson's reading of poems rests upon a misconception of the nature of poetry and the nature of language, then *nonsense* is not too harsh a term. But if his criticism does involve a sound account of language and of poetry, then it certainly is the sort of thing which the literary critic ought to have been doing all the time; it is the sort of thing which the literary critic can never again neglect doing, once he has seen it; and it is certainly the sort of thing that the critic in the past, by and large, has not done.

For the significance of Empson's criticism is this: his criticism is an attempt to deal with what the poem "means" in terms of its structure *as a poem*. To sense its importance, one must recall what the critic in the past has attempted to do: either he attempted to find the goodness of the poem (and its status as poetry) in terms of its prose argument—and in terms of the "truth" of what was being said—and thus made poetry compete with philosophy or science; or else he tried to find the poetry in the charm of the decorative elements—in the metrical pattern, in the sensuous imagery, etc. Often enough, of course, he tried to combine the two, usually in some formula which amounted to defining poetry as "truth appropriately embellished."

Empson fights throughout the *Seven Types* against this crippling division by showing how poem after poem actually "works" as a complex of meanings. Metaphor becomes functional in this account—important not for its isolated sensuous beauty but as it plays a part in establishing or qualifying the total meaning of the poem; metrics in the same way becomes functional, valuable not for its absolute beauty but rather for its corroboration of the play of meaning through the poem. Connotations become vastly important, for they are now seen to be, not hints of mysterious beauty which decorate the poem, but active forces in the development of the manifold of meanings that is the poem. And the unity of the poem becomes not something relatively static, but dynamic and

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* In his prefatory note to the *Seven Types* Empson makes his acknowledgements to Richards and to "Mr. Robert Graves' analysis of a Shakespeare Sonnet

The expense of spirit in a waste of shame,

in *A Survey of Modernist Poetry*." And if one cares to push the method back further still, there is William Butler Yeats' Empsonian analysis of Burns' "The white moon is setting" and Coleridge's analysis of the stanza from *Venus and Adonis* to which Richards has called especial attention.

the product of a development, the fulfillment of a total process.

I have taken the liberty of stating this summary in my own terms (as indeed any commentator must who is forced to make his own summary); but I do not feel that it violates the essential concept of poetry toward which Empson was working in 1930 and which seems to me clearly realized in his *English Pastoral Poetry* in 1938.

Empson in 1930, of course, was hardly prepared for neat summaries. Indeed, *Seven Types of Ambiguity* is a very difficult book. Part of the difficulty is simply a matter of style. The prose is often charming or striking but it is often elliptical and involved. As a matter of fact, it reads for the most part like uncommonly good talk, but talk which, having been transcribed to the page, suffers from the lack of gesture, of inflection of the voice, of change in tone which in the conversation would have made all clear and easy.

But the principal difficulty of the *Seven Types* springs from the fact that Empson was forced to fight a somewhat confused action against the romantic and magical conception of poetry in order to state his case at all. I say "somewhat confused," for the term "ambiguity" involves in itself a concession to the doctrine which Empson was attacking. The concept of ambiguity is derived from the point of view of prose where one logical meaning and only one is wanted. Moreover, the seven-fold classification of ambiguity partakes of the confusion, for it too involves certain concessions to the theories of poetry which Empson, wittingly and unwittingly, was committed to destroying.

To illustrate, Empson writes in his second chapter: "Ambiguities of this sort [two or more meanings all add to the single meaning of the author] may profitably be divided into those which, once understood, remain an intelligible unit in the mind; those in which the pleasure belongs to the act of working out and understanding, which must at each reading, though with less labour, be repeated; and those in which the ambiguity works best if it is never discovered. Which class any particular poem belongs to depends in part on your own mental habits and critical opinions. . . . " But this, surely, is to concede much too much. How do we know that there is an ambiguity if we never discover it? Or if some of us know (and by our knowledge have destroyed the poem's effectiveness for ourselves) must we not regard the reader who is still innocent and for whom the poem is still effective as the victim of a trick—in short, does not this view assume that poetry is a sort of hocus-pocus?

As for the second type mentioned above, must we not take it logically as the imperfectly apprehended version of the first—that is, if the labor of working out and understanding becomes progressively less on further readings, might not one expect that eventually it would disappear altogether? And furthermore, surely the pleasure in "working out" an intellectual problem (either poem or puzzle) does not stand on the same footing as the pleasure of total imaginative apprehension. One can understand why Empson is making the concessions: he is trying to be fair, to be reasonable, to take his reader as he finds him, to measure the poem against the various experiences

which one has in reading poems, some of which are far more difficult than others. The total context of the passage makes all this abundantly clear. But the attempt to adopt the viewpoint of the imperfect reader or the "reader in progress" seems to me not helpful but to muddle the issues.

Take another example, the following statement made in the third chapter: "One may say, then, that in ordinary careful reading this poem [Herbert's "I gave to Hope a watch of mine"] is of the third type, but when you know it sufficiently well, and have accepted it, it becomes an ambiguity of the first or (since it is verbally ingenious) of the second type." The phrase "in ordinary careful reading" insists plainly on the fact that the system of classification of ambiguities is psychological: the categories shift as we change readers or as the reader becomes a better reader; they do not describe fixed properties of the poem (that is, of the poem "properly" read by an ideal reader). Yet would not Empson's book have been, on the whole, clearer to the apprentice reader whose vagaries he strives to accommodate if Empson had adopted a rigid system of categories and let his reader adapt his shifting readings to it? Or, better still, if Empson had not bothered with categories of ambiguity at all, but had simply given us his readings of the poems with no generalizations at all except: "This can sometimes happen in poetry—look, this poem proves it"? Clearly, the categories are the product of the developing powers of Empson himself who moulded them from his own personal process of exploration.

Yet the defective framework—if it is defective—is not of any ultimate importance. The framework selected allowed Empson to write the book; it gave him an opportunity for the brilliant asides and, most important of all, for the analytical commentaries on one poem after another. To have these is the important thing: a satisfactory codification, if one is ever feasible or necessary, may well come later and at our leisure.

The attacks on Empson's work have, however, concerned themselves with other matters than his scheme of categories. Anyone who is committed to take the details of the poem as seriously as Empson is committed to take them is bound to run afoul of the textual scholars and the literary historians. They have picked him up from time to time for slips of one sort or another—he has misquoted a text or adopted a reading which textual criticism does not sanction as that of the poet. Geoffrey Tillotson in his recently issued essays has pointed out one or two such mistakes. And I notice in the Milton chapter of *English Pastoral Poetry* the curious howler that Adam and Eve's "children were the result of the fall"—an interpretation which Genesis may possibly suggest but never *Paradise Lost,* to which Empson is referring. But the slips are just that—not seriously important, and, considering Empson's tremendous range, they are astonishingly few.

The general charge leveled at Empson is far more serious. It amounts to this: that he forces upon the poem his own personal associations, idiosyncratic readings of which the poet must have been unconscious, strained analogies of which the poet was surely innocent. And this charge, if sustained, calls in question the value of his whole enterprise.

Empson is thoroughly conscious of the power of his critical instrument and that it is a power which may be misused. For example, in his *Seven Types,* after pointing out to T. S. Eliot what some passages of Shelley criticized by Eliot might be made to mean, Empson adds: "I do not say that I agree with all this [his own explication of Shelley's lines]: it seems an unwise extremity of sensibility." After treating another such passage from Shelley, he goes on to concur generally in Eliot's criticism of the passage: "I agree very heartily with what Mr. Eliot was saying at the time, and certainly these meanings [which he points out are to be found in the passage] are not so much united as hurried on top of each other, but it is, after all, a pun, almost a conceit; it seems rather a creditable thing to have happened to Shelley."

This passage, by the bye, with its praise of Shelley for having produced a pun, almost a conceit, is calculated to leave the orthodox critic fuming. He will scarcely be disposed to disentangle the left-handed compliment to Shelley from the critical principle involved; or if he does stop to disentangle it, he will probably use it to damn Empson. How does one distinguish between meanings that are merely "hurried on top of each other" and those which are "united"? And if the reader is to meet the poet half-way, how far is he to be allowed to go in providing meanings for the poem? Is this not another instance of Empson's lamentable habit of going much more than half-way? Shelley's own meanings, clearly to be discerned there in the poem, are all that either Shelley or the orthodox critic requires.

Yet the passages quoted from Empson do show that he is quite aware of the problem involved: namely, that one can make out a case for richness and complexity in almost any poem—in the poem that has not earned it as well as the poem that has; and that the mere process of spinning out a web of complexities and ambiguities is not sufficient to validate the poem. There must be a further criterion (cf. the chapter on "Good Sense" in Richards' *Coleridge on Imagination*).

Yet, to admit the fact that there must be a further criterion does not mean that the critic can abjure the responsibility of reading the poem as fully and completely as he can or that the personal associations of the critic must not be fully engaged, and more than that, even given a loose rein.

Empson certainly gives them a loose rein himself, but that is not to say that he often lets the reins fall out of his grasp. To me this seems rarely to occur. But the principle of control has to be a flexible one. It can hardly be reduced to a hard-and-fast rule. It can, however, be adumbrated, and I can see little to quarrel with in Empson's attempt to do so in the following passage: "In so far as an ambiguity sustains intricacy, delicacy, or compression of thought, or is an opportunism devoted to saying quickly what the reader already understands, it is to be respected. . . . It is not to be respected in so far as it is due to weakness or thinness of thought, obscures the matter in hand unnecessarily. . . . , or, when the interest of the passage is not focussed upon it, so that it is merely an opportunism in the handling of the material, if the reader will not easily understand the ideas which are being shuffled, and will be given an impression of

incoherence." In other words, if an ambiguity is functional in developing the poet's total effect, it is justified: it is not justified if it is merely "decorative," a mere witty extravagance, a sleight of hand which calls attention to itself and resists fusion with the other elements of the poem in the total effect. It is true that Empson's statement is littered with subjective criteria, that it leaves room for many divergent judgments, that it provides no "objective" criterion. But to admit this need not commit us to mere impressionism or give criticism over to a complete relativism. We shall get into the relativistic imbroglio only if we let our desire for complete objectivity in criticism triumph over our common sense.

The strength of Empson's position can be shown most convincingly by considering the alternative to which the conventional critic is committed. Even the die-hard anti-Empsonian is forced to admit that the reader must help in imaginatively reconstructing the poem; that the reader must be alive to the associations of words; that poetry is in some sense "rich" and "thick" where prose is "thin." And if the same critic urges against Empson that Empson is engaged in forcing meanings on the poem whereas the conventional critic is reading out of the poem merely what the poet can be proved to have put into it, one need only ask to be allowed to examine his proof. What we can *prove* that the poet put into the poem is only that which is amenable to such proof. We shall always emerge with no more than the gaunt skeleton of the poem, for the poetry itself will have been removed in the process. We shall always come out with a theme or a logical "argument" or a plot.

The usual dodge which the conventional critic uses at this point (and I use the word "dodge" deliberately) is to say that the poetic flesh which adorns the bones of the argument is by definition beyond analysis; it can be experienced emotionally, it can be appreciated, but it cannot be discussed. In brief, the poem is defined as consisting of logic and emotion, the first subject to analysis, the second only to be "felt."

The critic, if pressed to the point, will usually appeal to magic: true poetry is invested with a magic which it is unprofitable to attempt to analyze and which analysis, indeed, may desecrate. The more intelligent proponents of this theory might actually find in Empson's own words some support for their charge that he is setting out to destroy the magical effects of poetry. For example, Empson writes: "Personally I am pleased and given faith by this analysis, because it has made something which seemed to me magical into something that seems to me sensible." One can imagine the opposition's counterblast: "See! Just so. Mr. Empson denies poetry its magic, the very thing which in the past has been its glory, the very thing which I myself ask of poetry. For, as he says himself, if he admires a poem, he feels uneasy unless he (being the heir of I. A. Richards' naturalism) can explain it away with some kind of rationalistic hocus-pocus—can dismiss it with some explanation which really explains nothing and finds its real justification in making him feel that poetry is somehow scientific; that is, sensible and worth his while."

Such a retort would not be completely wide of the remark, for the phrasing of Empson's remark does reveal a kind of personal bias which, if insisted upon,

would weaken the case for his kind of criticism. But one can accept the term "magic" in all the senses in which one ought to want to apply it to poetry, and still defend the vast utility of what Empson has done. "Magical," in a sense, the effects of great poetry are and always will be; that is, such effects cannot be predicted or concocted in accordance with a formula—as Empson, of course, nowhere claims. But there is magic and magic.

What the conventional critic tends to take refuge in is a kind of *black* magic: it is secret, dark, and not to be peered into. But poetry, fortunately, is a white magic, and the more closely that we look into it the better. Its "magic" has nothing to fear from the closest inspection. And on this matter Empson's own comment is very much to the point: " . . . the view . . . that poetry cannot be safely analysed seems to me to remain ignoble; and in so far as people are sure that their pleasures will not bear thinking about, I am surprised that they have the patience not to submit them to so easy a destruction."

If the implications of Empson's criticism are profound for the aesthetic of poetry, they are quite as profound for literary history. (It ought to be axiomatic that you cannot change your conception of poetry without modifying to some extent your view of the poetry of the past.) Empson, though not undertaking to write literary history in either of his books, has not been able to refrain (or has wisely decided not to refrain) from comments which take him far into considerations of literary history. A constant theme in the *Seven Types* is the special nature of nineteenth-century poetry—the ways in which it was cut off from certain poetic resources and its tendency, by way of compensation, to overexploit others. The state of the language in the Elizabethan period with its fluid grammar which allowed for certain kind of subtlety and richness comes in for a great deal of attention. There is a memorable passage which speculates on the effect on the poetry of Shakespeare of such circumstances as "the shortness of individual runs. . . . [which] would keep the actors from being bored with the text," the actors' "casual but detailed knowledge" of the text, their "desire for continual additions," their "capacity to see distant verbal connections," and their "well-informed interest in the minor characters of the story." This passage, it is true, is introduced to defend some of Empson's discoveries by showing that it was possible that Shakespeare intended them, "delicate cross-references" though they are. But it is nevertheless one of the most refreshing and illuminating comments on the circumstances of Elizabethan play production that I know of.

Yet Empson's comments on the details of literary history, even in the admirable *English Pastoral Poetry,* are incidental speculations and asides. Empson has not attempted to systematize them. In spite of its title, *English Pastoral Poetry* remains a collection of stimulating samplings from the ironic mode rather than a history of the English pastoral. One can well imagine, by the bye, the sense of complete frustration which that book would probably induce in the well-trained American graduate student who looked into it expecting to find what he considered pastoral poetry. The Elizabethan double plot! A Shakespeare sonnet! These are not pastorals! And though he might

admit the relevance of the chapter on Marvell's "Garden," or the chapter on *The Beggar's Opera* through deference to Swift's having called it a "Newgate pastoral," the presence of a chapter on *Alice in Wonderland* would be likely to confound him completely.

Granted his training, he has a right to be confounded. For him, unless he is an unusual student or has had training in an unusual graduate school, the pastoral is a "form" into which "material" is poured. Or to change the metaphor, it is a kind of costume which the poet assumes, like a pirate suit at a masquerade ball. The wearer may alter the details of the costume, but only within limits: he may omit the patch over the left eye or use a broad leather belt in lieu of the gaily colored sash. If one is to have a pastoral, there must be a recognizable shepherd's costume: the graduate student wants to see the shepherd's pipe and the sheep. He expects to see these things because his work in English literature has been a study conducted in the museum—a history of this and other costumes. He looks for something external, for he has been trained from the antiquarian's point of view.

Empson's pastoral, on the other hand, is a mode, a specialization of irony, an inner thing. It is a particular way of relating certain things to other things. It is not external and it is not dead. It is very much alive, for it sees the matter from the standpoint of the practising poet. Because it is very much alive it is capable of altering drastically some of the current generalizations about the history of English poetry. For literary history waits ultimately upon criticism.

Our established habit, however, is to reverse the roles of criticism and literary history. I read recently a statement by one of our more distinguished literary historians and bibliographers. It is curious and typical. He went on to say: "There is much **** work still to be done. The **** edition, in process, will be a help—it should not be assumed to be an end; Mr. ****'s *Letters* of **** will be a help. When we have used our battery of methods and tools to establish what **** said and the circumstances under which he said it, we shall then need to enquire, in a beyond-graduate-school level, what was the significance of it."

Those of us whose desire to see this inquiry "in a beyond-graduate-school level" is not immoderate, may be able to moderate it a little further by reflecting that it will never come to pass anyway since such scholarship will never actually have done with the application of its "battery of methods and tools" with which it is fascinated and which is its glory and its limitation.

Meanwhile the inquiry into significances which Empson and others are carrying on does not wait upon the dawning of the scholar's millenium. Yet it will affect profoundly the work of the literary historian and ultimately of the scholar. It will affect it by altering the estimation in which various poems, plays, and novels are held; and even more importantly by opening up another dimension of literature, if not to unconscious appreciation, at least to conscious inspection and discussion.

The scholar quoted above oversimplifies the problem: he suggests that once the text is established and once "the circumstances under which" the text was

promulgated are known, all will be easy. (I hope that I understand him here, but I am confident that I do not misunderstand the sentiments of his brothers in the craft.) But important as the text is—and Empson's concern with nuances gives a fresh sanction to the textual critic's concern for detail—and important as "the circumstances under which" may be in any given case turn out to be, it is more important still that we know how the words work together and the various levels of meaning which they encompass.

In a time in which the study of literature threatens to turn into sociology and in which the death of the humanities is prophesied openly, it is impossible to overestimate the significance of the kind of criticism of which Empson remains the most brilliant exponent. He is certainly not the old-fashioned man of letters who charmingly bows us into his snug study with a quotation from Lamb and afterwards bows us out with a quotation from Hazlitt. But he is certainly not, on the other hand, merely the bright young man with a bag full of psychological gadgets. He is one of our ablest critics and one of our soundest, and his work is fraught with revolutionary consequences for the teaching of all literature and for the future of literary history.

ELIZABETH LEE:

Obliterations

Upon this white and navigated sea,
On stinging silver, the tumultuous wave
Is not more rugged than youth's bounding self;
From depths awakening see him try
To wrench from stars, in every low behave
As if old decks convulsed him and old gulf.

Spread him a shoreline crescent as the moon
And rashly voiced with motion of small stones,
He will not lay him down in slender line;
But like a hound or tiny bird run
With deep printing—the rear guard of his bones
In sand over his shoulder gone to brine!

T. WEISS:
Speedy Pastoral

The world was spelt whirled
they say, one molten mass,
as, in the beginning,
the turning wish of a vase;
and form and poise, gayly
staid, rose out of the most
passionate lap of speed . . .

As though a figure
in a rural frieze or buxom vase,
a glitter-harnessed star,
stirring into blends and blues
of metal, car-encased, and consciousness
as lark should suddenly come awake,

and beginning to whirl,
recall the lakes of primal licking,
only chaos-locked, the triumphs
of turn, sight-peopled, vase was
at creation when sights themselves
first opened, blinking, eyes
in vastest nation . . .

as though a figure
in a rural frieze come from
a funereal urn of moldy hatreds
and dusty teas: the scrawnel pipes
turn music back to scrawny straw,
and dawn a jackdaw dunce
attic-set to feeding fleas
for the rigid vase of our sobriety,
of our plodding ways the dust we mold—

we fly, with the angels of ranging
and the windy glance luxuriate
in ambled ease, a myrrhiment
of movement and of whirlingdervish trees . . .

2

pumpkin was our thinking;
mouse minding our delights, nibble-
nooned; frog-puffed and -fagged
the music of our fate: monotony
mouthing with the ripened rat's tooth
our most passionate wheat; our days
ashadowed and cindercrouching
in fierce remembrance of night . . .

O figure anonymous as the melts
of time, richly clad in cleopatra
dust and the stuff-of-frown
that chokes all bells,
tall in the enemy of ember
and the shadow, fanged, of song
breathing the rocky air of stone . . .

3

a moment of alladin,
rubbing the mild breezes into brilliance
and clangor of a ruthless athlete
making fierce forays on our sallow
cheeks and our bleak walls
O
the green and beechen din,
the genie of the city, its tempo
merciless, racing with carillons
of thunder down the roads and roads
unraveling of our rising very and our
rivered wingdom:
on wheels we rush the city
to the country, rush the country, caught,
to joy;
for our delight the melodies,
presto-piped, shower their sharpest
lode of grandeur: orpheused our stone,
we strenuously loll in the lap of passion
to the pitch of ditty and Leda
gript plunged melting into the savagery
of the swan of fire and most knotted now:

the voltaged eyes, and wholly glaring
eyes—leaves of velocity flung free,
of leaves at fullness, whirling to indian
wardance speed of green: and in royal rush
a spindrift of frightened faun
the grass: vines blandly writhing
in the grasp of growing, cameraed
in the work of months here moment:

and sudden country
opening before us a breaking
of the ground and the gliding forth
of a twilight's city, tower-propt
on rhapsody, upon us purplely
a train of rapture

as the sun round-colored
and the absolute of flame, glints
through the trees a trillion joy-targeted
and shooting guns . . .

4

anticipation become
the act: impassioned pastoral,
once cart- and shepherd-hearted,
leaping for us, the waking figure
in its careen of energy, a radiance-
clutched star, sweeping the cattle
and the sprawling sleep along with it:

a town this coolness and this reach
forever crowded with our noisy eating
of the scenery and the flesh,
broadcasting, of our blow—our jostling
of the air to fill it with the fragrant
frenzy, tigered, of itself . . .

bookish boys and clay-ground girls,
we speed the pastoral
into revolving's vase, the leafy
chase whose victim is itself

and Bacchus fallow-leafed, so laughter-

twirled, the trees in rapture's race,
till we, braided in the brawny ease,
are soaring-sure, marble of mounting
as though a figure
in a frieze . . .

Words Before Eden

(as one should shroud
a rose, shackle the leaping
freedom of the faun, or tell
the stript-to-essence stream
to staunch its flow)

Do not be wantonly pure:
shed your sinful chastity
and don my hands a resonant
prayer, so win yourself
virginity inviolate and sure;

what is this flesh
that it should hide its talents'
gleam, some deepest samite
shame, in the dark
shadows of the shy?

let it go, save for
the clothing—silken shot as
bow—of look, rich in rustles
of smoky sigh: let it go naked
in the adornment of the eye;

boldly apricot and plum
bare their allbreasts
to the ripening gnaw of sun:
how shall you know
your riches save I un-

earth them from
the clumsy husk a blind, O
coffin, cryptic, of stiff clothes!
and like a tune, its mouth
stuffed with dusty harlot hush,

bring them to you
in my reflecting, fiercely-
echoing hands, hungry glass
of a hungry moon
at its most loominous noon?

(as one should shroud
a rose, shackle the leaping
freedom of the faun, or tell
the stript-to-essence stream
to staunch its flow)

ROSAMUND DARGAN THOMSON:

From Their Gardens the Very Old

The old in their evening gardens are behaving
childishly: farewells
above the greying, folding bells
to every pretty wing.
From their soft gardens the very old
are not led easily. They must be told
how the air threatens them when light is done.

What is the question in their shaded hearts?

Bending in their gardens at early song
they seized new flowers,
greedy for buds, beseeching buds along
even the angry branch.
The infertile men and women morning-long
handled the hale old earth, adored its powers:
sinking many seeds with prayer and witless tears
so that at noon in their kempt and throbbing gardens
they slept comforted in full sun.

What brought the shadow in their fading blood?

NICHOLAS MOORE:
The Mind Is, the Mind Has

for Patty Craig

Waters and weapons, the face free, the trace
Of a beloved scenery, the palm
Of the hand turned, turned towards that
Which is the imaginary tree, the imaginary map.
The map has our designs upon it. Here
A mossy bungalow. There bole of a tree,
The handsome oak, the tall poplar. The mind

Teaches as much. Red flamingos,
Even dodos with long faces and legs
Short and stubby, weird paraphernalia,
Have their existence in that.
That effluence of mind. The mind is flat,
But draws its circles, draws its rigmarole.
We see the sea. We see the sands we see.

And what of weapons? On the imaginary
Island have we composed a tower of doubt,
Long snouts stuck from the windows in defence.
What do we fear? The panther is not here.
Across the map, our mapped love, our mapped faces
We read of love's designs. We follow lines
From here to there. The imagination is that.

Sunny Weather in Sussex

Beside these windows illness looks its best,
Seeing the view, the subterranean green,
Hillocky hills, horizon-crying clouds,
A chocolate landscape for a chocolate mind,
A stone landscape for a stone mind. The smoothness
Of hills illuminates the winter sun,
Cottage and car cry country in the weather.

As if the invalid sees sunny things!
He sees a sun revolve upon a carpet,
A purple sun upon a yellow rug.
The weather misty, all the hills like rocks
Pointing their proud peaks to a rolling sky,
The meadows grey, the houses grey, the calves
Mooing grey moos across the grey evening.

The hills are dry. The windowpanes are wet.
The sun is a marine, a lucent blue.
The hedges growl like foxes at the ducks,
The caterpillars crawl upon your thumb,
Your voice is changed to a thin whistle, to
A country lullaby. Illness performs,
For its distractions, metamorphoses.

The shapes of time, the shapes, the country shapes.
It is the time of country. It is weather
Of illness, winter weather, lemon sun
Striking a delicateness across the fields,
The amber calves, the hillocks green among
The mud. All this for winter. All this
For a landscape of the mind, chocolate

For chocolate, stone for stone, the shapes
Moveable and eternal. Or we might
Sketch in the seven seas and the four winds,
And have our mermaids and our bearded priests
To worship sun and cold and wind and weather.
We might, we might. We might be possible.
We might as well have the lemon sun for winter.

VIRGINIA RUSS:

Boy on the Mountain

While the bomb fragments hail:—
huddling under blue cypress, the flock,
lambs flat against the ground like green tombstones:—
through the larded wool,
his fingers rub the ewe's ears:

A falcon-diving-place:—
and the gritted roar scours the sky
blue and bare as a sea girl once more:—
lambs toothing the grass tufts
he squints through goat-dark hair:—

how when the old wars were done
they beat swords into thigh bones
for the bronze god to stand on this shore:—
among the islands,
blood-soaked sails bobbining,—
over the white sea, islands, bone neat,
(vertebrae on a white neck)

and the bread-brown legs of children
fat and warm as fresh-baked loaves:—
not crow-beak-warped, as now, for lack,
their eyes burned holes in logs,—like the sick
martyrs standing in the basilica
(charred harvest of corn husks),

under enamelled sky,
cobalt, huddled in bales,
their silver fingers rigid as forks
the rows of their eyes staring
blue on darker blue on green
like rings on peacock tails

And looking down out of the dome
the Lord's eyes
framed in gold mosaic, eyes,
pointed and long as the dark hooked boats, sad eyes, black:—
leaping like spearheads

out of myriad squares of gold
(laid each to each like fish scales)

Eyes seeing all the islands:
flat and wide as the mayor's walls,
charcoal limned,
(the ram
when the knife jabs into the throat vein):—

Oh silver-sandalled
over blue-brocaded waters:
(ankle knobs gleaming
stepping through links of the island chain)

a healing yellow ointment,
over the gouged lands
spreads fertileness
until each stalk of wheat bends
like a consenting candle pulled under
by the night's toothed grain

And wakening late, the bird-eyed children
shall hear the fat sound
of noon-ripe peaches

JANE MAYHALL:

What the Morning Glories Are in the City

From our glass-paned places
we first heard those morning blue trumpets,
flat as silk were their mouths,
a notation of purest music
flicked on the iron strings of the lattice.

Even the roof-garden crouched,
its trees swayed like the mane of a lion,
lulled was its great savage head:
the top of the city.

But smaller than that were we,
holding joy in a glass
and sucking like bees,
seeming to grow industriously patient.

(Little windows opened everywhere
like tiny wings.)

Variously poised in attitudes of listening,
the sound was only our humming hearts.
But we saw each other,
embroidered in the morning light
we were bright blossoms without stems,
a spun inaudible chorus
grown sweet as flowers.

Harvest

Walking in the stalk fields where the future
with loose tassels is blowing a foreboding
over our heads,
the harvest not yet handled.

Between the cascade corridors of leaves
and the long fruit falling green-eared,
there is mystery.
This astral weather

of waiting has achieved distance in us;
we are farther than we were before.
The soaked root shivers,
empties its sealed aorta

into our ingrown vein. A vision!
How can we remain, poor toiling vines,
woven like a prelude through the shuttled stamen
of awakening,
the harvest not yet handled?

For intoned in this forest of flowering
is a low moaning matter, a *thing* unsown.
Oh, drop to our knees and grub the grown soil,
progenitors of neglect,
who seek the seed, regret.

JAMES HANLEY:
Fancy Free

Just docked off a ship, and I'm in a pub called The Mare's Nest, and I'm fancy free. All on my own, shipmate. I've ordered a pint of real ale and now I can stand here drinking it; no need to hurry about it, no need to think of anything save a new ship, dream about a special kind of ship a sailor wants and never gets. I sup at my ale and I think about this dream ship.

Everything fine and shining here; talk about music, hear them singing back there, and that man with the accordion, and Susie's one large smile. This pub's shaped like a horseshoe, always come to the same place everytime I dock. It's that girl, Susie. I wouldn't mind marrying her, shipmate. I'm always teasing away at her, aiming to get her to do some unfreezing, but she won't bite. No, sir. Nice and warm here, too, all that stuff shining in bottles, and this broad counter full of glasses and everybody's happy, drinking away there, you wouldn't think there was a war on at all. Everybody talking, and always that music back there. Aim some feller's just got home from a long trip and is celebrating, maybe Australia.

That swing door's opening, people going in and out, no end to their coming and going. I drain my glass, reckon I'll fill it again, so I gets my eye on Susie. We've had many a chat, Susie'n me, yes sir, many a chat you might call exclusive, had her on my own. Well, I've got her on my own now. So first thing I say is, "Hey there, Susie, fill her up again." Over she comes. Lord! She's fat, but jolly with it.

"Hello," she says.

"Hello you," I say, my eye on all her buxomness, that face like a light, all smile, and pretty teeth.

"And how are you?" she says.

"Me! I'm fine, how's yourself?" and all the time I'm getting her measure, height and weight and looks; what a weight, sailor.

"My! You're growing into a fine big girl, Susie," I say. "Your ma must be well pleased with you."

Hands me my beer, talk about a smile being broad, you can't beat this one, I gamble you never saw one like it in your life, sort of smile can swallow you up. Oh she's a big girl all right, and she could give a sailor a fine time, too, but she's odd. That's what's wrong with Susie, she's odd because she doesn't like sailors, and she tells me so. Course I just laugh.

"What's wrong with a sailorman, Susie?"

"What isn't?" she says, impish to the hilt.

"How about you and me going off to the Pavilion. Flash Dan and Gertie are on this week. Say yes."

"I never go to theatres."

"You should. A theatre's a damn fine place if there's good turns on."

"No," she says. "I wouldn't go, even then, *really,*" and she means this, and you know she means it.

"Well, will you come for a walk, how about a nice walk, or a ride on a tram into the country?"

"Into the country. In the middle of January?"

"Sorry," I say, "my rotten geography, all to hell these days. Well, a walk then, just an ordinary kind of walk, and I'll buy you a box of chocolates, and what's more I'll take you home. There's fair for you, and I don't mind meeting your ma."

"But I don't want to go for a walk," she says.

And I know why. That's what's odd about Susie. She hates sailors, and that's tough on many a man who could give her a good time. I'd even marry her, if she'd marry me. But nothing doing. She's no one for sailors.

"Listen, Su, you answer me a fair question. Why'd you hate sailors? No different to any other men 'cept they're more often away than at home, have a habit of getting lit up now and again, sprawling themselves about." I keep looking at her, holding her own look. And I am thinking.

Take a sailor off a ship, unleash him, let him go, and what happens? Goes and gets lost.

"You're a fine big girl, Susie, and a credit to your mother, not forgetting your da, and I aim to marry you if you'll only give me a chance."

See her face go turkey red. I'm the hundredth man who's said that.

"I'd never marry any sailor," she says.

"Ah, Susie, you're so used to being asked to marry a sailor that you forget that one might be genuine."

Hear her laugh then, just like a tumble of bells.

"Suppose that man's you," she says.

"Yes sir. That's correct. That man's me. What about it, Susie?"

She goes away and refills my glass.

"I'm not joking," I say. "I *mean* what I say."

"You sailors make me ill," she says, bubbling up with laughter; everybody's looking at us, but I don't mind.

"Stop teasin' a man, Susie."

"Not teasin'. I mean what I say, just like you do, Mr. Sailor."

Mr. Sailor. There's something new. Calling a man Mr. Sailor.

"Oh, all right, you won't marry me, and that's that. Goodbye, Susie."

I pick up my drink and I walk off into the snug. First chap I meet up with is Saxeby, haven't seen him for two years. Nearly shakes my arm off.

"What are you having?" he says.

"Mild and bitter for me."

"What! Plain beer. No siree," and he calls for whiskies.

He calls for five Jamesons, which show he has company. In comes Susie.

There's a red face for you, blush on blush coming to it, so, aiming to set it

on fire I calls out, "Well, shipmates, meet Susie, a fine big girl who's going to marry me and become Mrs. Johnson. Here's your health, Susie," I say, raising my glass.

How she scuffs out! Think of a mouse scuffling into a corner and that's just how she is.

"All the best, sir. Here's to the next trip."

"Half a minute," Saxeby growls; *"here's* to the next trip. Why, I'm only just home."

Susie goes off and I watch her go. Before I leave Saxeby I have three more Jamesons, two shandies, even a glass of port to top up with. Then I go back to the bar. Susie is all on her own washing the glasses.

"How about it, Susie, I really mean it," I say.

Leaning up against the counter I can see her smiling to herself; she has her back to me.

"Oh, be off with you; I tell you I'd never marry a sailor."

"O.K. I'll take you at your word," and I do—finish off my beer and decide to go.

Off you go, man, off you go; you've as much as you can carry now without making yourself a nuisance in this town where you don't know nobody, and don't give a damn anyhow, save for a pretty girl who could melt the ice in a man. Hug yourself to yourself, sailor, then get out. And don't *sprawl.* Keep your head up. So at last I'm out, and Susie's still filling up the glasses.

Turn your coat collar up, draughty in these streets, folk hurrying by, and nothing much to see of their faces, terribly hurried they are, except a woman or two, how they sidle along. Plenty of time on their hands it seems. Sidle and lurk, could turn themselves into shadows if they wanted to. Catch you coming round a corner, coming out through a pub door, calling two a crowd and saying "Sorry," touching you, as though they were trying to crush through a crowd and there's no crowd at all, just you and her. O. K. You hear her say she's sorry, and while she's saying it you get a nostril full of stuff they have about their persons, smells good.

"Hello there! How's things?"

"Hello sailor!"

"Cold isn't it?"

"Isn't it just?"

Right you are, shipmate; away you go. And away we go, me and her, right to the pub where Susie works, aim on making her jealous. Here we are. I call out for two drinks, she likes port, all those kind of Janes have a palate for port, and while I'm calling for it, I'm dead up against a whippersnapper, a fish-flesh shrimp of a man, a sniff and snoop of a man, reckon he never walked proper in all his life, hopped and lurked about maybe from the time he was born. See his kind behind walls, in corners, passing through any place where the lights are just going out. Up hard against him, since this pub's crowded, and that counter full.

"Scuse me," I say, aiming to get our drinks from the crowded counter.

He moves back, fish-eye wide open on this Jane who's with me. Is this sniffer and snooper married, I ask myself.

"Here you are, kid," and I hand this Jane her drink.

That shrimp of a man can't keep his eye off my Jane at all. Out of the corner of my eye I watch him, and then I wink at him.

"All the best, sister."

"All the best, sailor," she says, and hang it, I know she's said the very same thing to many another sailor; machine touch to her way of saying it. Eyes sparkling and cheeks shining, teeth laughing up at you, nothing new to these, not exclusive to you, sailor, any goddam sailor who's got the shivers and wants to stop being an iceberg. See her smile. That port sure warms you up, I'm thinking, but I don't say it to her, got more sense, tie those silly words into knots and fling them through that door, meaning nothing, like acting in a play, say it a hundred times over, and she'll say back her piece. But Susie's different. She won't cotton on to a sailor-man, and now I'm thinking it's that what makes me like her so much. A fine girl, all right, but tough on sailors. Some women are like that.

O. K. shipmate. Forget her, that's what they call romance for Jolly Jack the Sailor. O. K. sister, look my way, you who I met just now holding up that street corner. I say look my way, sister. You've a way with you, you're four-square; you know what I want, and I know what I want. Right! Fair's fair, shipmate, now we know where we are.

"Have another port, kid?"

"That's fine," she says.

I say, "It's cold tonight. I was asking Susie there if she'd come for a walk with me into the country, but she doesn't like that place in the middle of January, and it's just tough that I'll be on a grey ocean just when the place is beginning to look green. That's tough on her as well, eh, Susie," and again I call out her name; this makes her blush all over again. I like that; to see her blushing is like watching all kinds of bright colours.

"Hey, there, Susie, bring another drink, will you?"

"D'you mind saying exactly what you want?" she says, cocking her head up.

"Same as before."

This Jane's jammed up close to me now, and so is this shrimp-shank man; he wears a grey suit. Can't keep his eyes off my girl at all. I don't mind though, so long as it sticks to just looks. This bird's all stranger to me, and he looks dry. All right, sailor, give him a drink, too. The whole world's shining here, and everybody's gay; give this fish-eyed feller a drink; he looks as if he could do with one. Let him guzzle it down, then you can get off about your business. Time's flying.

Have a good look at this Jane you met up with, have a good look while she's trying her port. I do, and watch her head nodding. She has her eye on me; I see her little gloved finger pointing towards that door, and that look and that finger say, "Time to go, sailor," and so it is, but first let me get this queer man his drink.

All on his own here, now what's he look like, *really?* Well what? Take a good squint. Ha ha! Sometime or other this man was pressed down, some large hand on his head, pressing him down, because that was his place in this city, sailor, being pressed down and fated to wear a grey suit for ever. Take another look. So I take another look.

"D'you want this drink or not?" and this makes me look up. Why, it's Susie with the drink!

"Course I want the drink, it's for this pal of mine."

Straightaway I hand him this drink, take a bit of a sniff as I do, bad manners of course, but just curious, no more than curious. There must be a reason why a man drinks gin neat.

"Good luck to you, sir," he says.

To *me!* Hang it, it's make me grow at least ten foot high. Good luck, sir. Ah! He can take his stuff, too. That gin's clean gone, well gone. Something to this little man, after all, fidgeting about under my shoulder.

"Have another." And up goes his hand, then he's shaking his head.

"Oh, come on, have another," I say, and suddenly this Jane's pinching my arm and nudging me, but I'm not noticing, just thinking about how this feller would look if he got really drunk.

"Two gins there, Susie."

And two she brings. "Thank *you."*

"Here you are, all the best to you. Not my kind of drink, shipmate, but try everything once; that's the kind of a person I am."

I look at this Jane.

"Hold hard, sister." I'm saying to myself, "Hold hard there!" This nudging, this pinching at my arm's getting fair irritating, so I say out loud, "Hold hard, sister, I'm coming in half a tick."

"Come now," she says, "come right now, can't wait all bloody night for you."

There's language for you, sailor. That gets me proper. So I say, "O. K. You clear out right now and find another mug; I'm aiming to get warmed up on nothing else but gin tonight. But if it's a cup of tea or coffee, or a pair of silk stockings, sister, well, I'm not a begrudging man, so here you are."

Watch her smile, money for nothing, that's what her expression says, and off she goes. Don't know whether I'm sorry or glad, can't make up my mind about it. I look at this grey-suited man.

"Look here, shipmate, why not let's go round into the snug? Up against a counter a sailor's bound to be free and easy, and so's any Jane who likes to come in for a glass of port. I aimed at getting the ice melted out of me tonight, but now I've changed my mind."

The little chap looks at me now. Ah, there's a bird face for you, sir, keeps looking hard at me.

"Melting the ice out of you," he says.

"Yes, getting unfroze," I say. "What's the matter with that?"

No answer. He's dumb. I aim he don't understand my language. Let's go

round to the snug, shipmate. Round we go. That snug's cleared out, there's a fire just for us two. We sit down on a dark wood settle. In comes Susie with more stuff.

"All the best, shipmate," I say, and he nods his little head.

"And the same to you, sir."

Sir again. I'm tickled to death. Now I can get a good look at him.

A sniff of grey whisker over a weak chin, and a pinched-looking gob. "I say, shipmate," I say, "something tells me I've seen you somewhere before."

At once he says, "And I've seen you. I know you, all your tribe."

Tribe! This is a new one on me. Tribe!

"Oh, and what tribe do I belong to?" I ask him.

He pauses, licks round his whisker, drops of anything must be precious to him. Look at his hands. White, long and dry sort of look about them, too. Like they were always aiming to clutch on to something warm, something that lasts. What's this mean, shipmate? Why, that this bird is lonely. Now I know. Yes sir. So I start talking to him about all manner of things that'll interest a man, and he talks, too. Blast my eyes! This fish is warming to it, slow, but warming to it all the same. Those Jamesons have come in and we're drinking hard now, and liking it. Looks as if we'll be here until throw out.

"So I belong to a tribe, eh," I say, smiling at him. Then I shout, giving him a clout on the back at the same time, "Have another, come on, drink that one up and have another. Winter's begun."

"Never knew it ended," he says.

Now that's odd, I think, queer to say a thing like that.

Susie comes in with two more drinks. Damn! How I enjoy looking at this girl.

"I say, Susie, look here, I want to talk to you, hang it, you're as fine as fine," but she's gone and the swish of a skirt is all I hear for reply.

Already this man's had four Jamesons, two gins, a shandy as cleaner-up, and now two more Jamesons are coming in.

"All the best, sir."

Sir again. Been sirring me half the evening.

"I've seen you *somewhere* before," I say. "Damn certain I have. If I'm not being too curious, what's your name?"

"Ranke," he says. "Ranke. Fred Ranke.'

Ranke! Have you met anybody name of Ranke, sailor, I ask myself. No. you haven't. Then where've you seen this man before?

"Work in this town?"

That gets him. Yes, he works in this town.

"What makes you look so grey?"

Figures, he says.

"What kind of figures?"

"Oh, just figures."

"Where do you work?"

"Take a turning to the right from here and when you get to the bottom

of the street, another sharp turn left, then across a road, and up an alley, this brings you into a wide street, look up, and there you are. That's where I work. Follow me?"

"Half a minute," I say. My mind's working fast, taking right and left turns, then across that road, down the alley, here I am in the wide street, look up as he said. Hell's bells, why, I know this place. Heck of a size, *huge* place.

"That's where I work," he says.

I sit back. I watch him. His face's changed, now it looks just like I seen it look when he's working. Got him. Now I know.

"Pass down between great walls, marvellous walls these, might be walls leading into Paradise, and doors everywhere, all shining, and clink and clank of office machines, and ringing of telephones, and they're not the only bells that ring. Go far down this corridor, always keeping to the port side, sorry shipmate, I mean the left-hand side, and we come to a hole in the wall, iron grille there. You're behind that. Am I right, shipmate?"

"You're quite right, sir," he says, "that's where you've seen me before."

I'm not surprised by sir any more. This man's so used to being in a world full of them, so I accept sirs by the dozen, and never get tired of him addressing me in the same way.

"Isn't that right?" I say. "You're behind a grille. You pay out coin to sailors' women, you have your hands dug into mountains of money; it might be sand or sugar or rubbish to you, so used to having your hand in it. Isn't that right?"

A mere nod of the head from him.

"This grille's finely woven, you might be a priest behind your confessional, you can't see anybody or anything except the face that's sort of flowed up to you. Another thing, you never look up. That's right, isn't it."

Another nod from him, he knows damned well I'm right.

"O. K.," I say. "Now, if you pushed your head through this grille, which you never do, and might be frightened to do, if you did, you'd see a fair long line of sailors' women, all drib and drab and shuffling up to your hole, and leaning about on walls and whispering, and never talking too loud, and edging up to your grille for their money, oh, so slowly edging up, by the mere inch, and one at a time they come to your grille. You don't move, do you? Your hands move, you say 'Name,' and then you take a look at the paper she hands in, and then from sheer habit you say 'Ship?' and she says that ship, and you dive into the mass of money and hand some out, never say good day, never say thanks, say nothing at all. That's you, now isn't it?

"Sun might be pouring in all over that place, still you say nothing. O. K. Saying nothing's a duty to do, and you do your duty, but now suppose you once or twice glanced up when a name was named, and a ship's name called out to you, why, you might have happened on my own sister who draws my monthly money. But you haven't happened on anybody. Two words circle your mind all morning. Name and Ship. And you dig your hands into money. That's why the grille's there, though believe me, shipmate, no sailor's woman would ever take more than was rightly hers, though you might not believe

in that, since you believe in nothing except figures, your head's full of them, full of nothing else, shipmate. How break away from them at day's end. I don't know, and God knows that you push yourself around all evening, crushing into this and that pub, all the time aiming to get away from your Figures, dancing in your head I'll bet, following you around everywhere. Isn't that so?"

"Maybe," he says, "maybe."

"I watched that Jane watch you," I say. "I could have had her for a mere nod of the head, but I can be an independent man, sir. But you couldn't, because you've lost the knack of looking at women in the right way. You'd scare them stiff. That's tough on you, but blame the grille, shipmate."

First time in all that evening I see this man smile. I can't believe it at first. He really smiles. And now his glass is empty.

"Have another, shipmate, have another."

In comes Susie.

"Hello, Susie. Well, have you changed your mind yet?"

"What about?" she says.

"Why, marrying me, of course."

She tosses her head. "It's time, we're closing, better go out by the back way, and watch you don't bump your head in the dark."

"I won't bump in any dark, don't you worry," I say. "Besides, this shipmate of mine knows how to get through dark places, don't you shipmate?"

Susie's sizing him up, smiling at his whisker and his gray suit. She looks hard at him, and then he gets up, sort of vanishes, anyhow he's gone, vanished just like he was shadow and not man.

"Who's that?" Susie says.

"Some poor rat," I say, "lived in this town all his life and grey from counting figures. But never mind him now. How about a date for tomorrow night, Susie, girl, you know I love you, truly I do."

I'm just beginning to feel fine, though I daren't put my hand in my pocket just yet, I don't want any shocks. "I love you, Susie," I say again.

All smiling, my, she's got pretty teeth, comes right up to me, gets hold of my arm.

"Why'd you tell lies?" she says. "I'd marry you if you didn't tell lies."

"What? *Me!* I never tell lies."

She squeezes my arm, that makes me feel good, but only for a moment, time for having a shiver, sailor, she doesn't mean what she says, kidding you up, though she likes saying it.

There! I got her now. Right round the waist.

"Give us a kiss, Susie," I say.

What a fine big girl she is, and such rosy cheeks, and what a back she has.

"I'll bet you could haul away on any weight of rope, Susie," I say.

"Time, gentlemen, time please."

There you are, sailor, you know that voice. That's the boss of this place. And there he is looking at the two of us, he's been watching us all the while,

talk about being sly.

"Now then, you two," he says, rather sharply, but he doesn't mean it of course, for Susie's the one who brings him all his business here. Besides, everybody knows she's promised to marry half a dozen men already. Having them on. That's part of the business, too.

"I say, look here, Susie, it's your night off tomorrow, and Flash Dan and Gertie'll still be on at the Pavilion. Say yes, there's a dear. I'll take you to the best seats, too, that's in the pit. I'll give you a whale of a time, honest I will. I mean it."

There she goes. Laughing again, ring a bells, sailor, Lord! I love listening to Susie laugh. And she *can* laugh, and shake with it, carrying all that weight like she does.

"Come on, kid, give's another kiss, won't you?"

That's just how I'm feeling now, shipmate, nice and rosy.

"Only one," she says.

Fine, fine! And I give her a kiss, hold on hard. Hell's bells, this girl could unfreeze a whole cargo of sailormen.

"How old are you, Susie? Nineteen and a half. Fine big girl for nineteen. Your ma must think a pile about you, Susie, not forgetting your da of course, who made a miracle happen."

Here we are, both laughing, and old Finch the licensee watching us all the time, but he knows me, I'm not dangerous and never was. But my, she's got a waist like a fisherman.

"You're the nicest girl I ever met in this town," I say.

"Oh, you liar," she says, giving me such a dig in the ribs, her voice rising. What does anything matter, anyhow, she's liking it and so am I. Not every night a sailor feels as gay.

"You *will* come to the Pavilion with me tomorrow night then. It's quite a respectable place, you know. Once saw our skipper sitting in a box there, that shows how good it is. Do come, Susie."

"I'll think about it," she says.

"No, don't think at all, just say yes, Susie," and I'm still holding on to her.

"Time, gents, time," Mr. Finch cries out. "Time, gents, time."

What a fog-horn of a voice the man has, to be sure.

Every sailor's gone except me, oh yes, this is a sailors' pub, sir. Yes, they've all gone now, back by quays to many a ship tied up, and some hard fast for their homes, and some away to get warmed up somewhere else, if you can get warmed up in this town, and they say there's places you can, by giving three soft taps on certain doors. Many another place these men have gone off to, up this and that street, and down that long, greasy-looking road, bit of a fog about tonight. If I go off down that road I'll happen up against a sailor hard bound and dry with it. I once met up with a sailor like that. Mightn't think it, but there are quite a few barnacled sailors about, barren of a ship's warmth and a sea smell.

Well, a shipmate just home knows how to warm up such men, yes sir, and

I say that without boasting.

There, she's gone. Wriggled out of my grasp while I was doing a bit of thinking. Ah well! But I hate letting her go. Am I dreaming, shipmate, has she really gone? Yes, she's gone. Let her go, sailor, and bang, your whole world's gone, how deeply fallen away to nothing, like breathing bubbles, all gone. Just then Mr. Finch comes in.

"Time, sailor," he says. "Everybody's away. You're the very last. Off you go."

"Waiting to take Susie home," I say.

"You run off and get ready then, Susie," he tells her.

I can't believe it. She's actually letting me see her home this evening. In two minutes she's back, ready to go. I grab her arm.

"Night, Mr. Finch," I say.

"Night, shipmate. Best of luck," and he gives me a wink. Off we go. We walk slowly that dark road.

"Look here, Susie, do marry me. I mean every word I say."

"I told you I'll never marry a sailor, *never*."

That's done it, that's finished it. You are dreaming, sailor, really dreaming. I see her to the house where she lives. I give her a squeeze.

"I mean what I say," she says.

O. K. You won't marry a sailor; all right, Susie. Go and marry that shrimp of a man I met up with tonight, gutless under his grey suit, marry him. There's a man pressed all his life by some large kind of hand, I reckon. Marry him, Susie, and press him to death. You hate sailors. All right then, go on hating them. Here's where you live, go in to your ma and da, tell them what a good girl you've been, tell them a sailor tried to get warmed up but that you just weren't biting. Tell them that. Night, Susie. I mean goodbye, Susie. You were fine for what you are. O. K. Here's where I turn. Down this street, and down another one, darker than dark is, then across to that dock. Up the gangway, along for'ard to your bunk, that's your place. O. K. Watch me give her a kiss and then I'm gone. That was all fine while it lasted, and any amount of singing and gay colours in The Mare's Nest this evening, and I'd all of Susie inside me, dreaming away there like there was nothing else to do in this life but dream. And I enjoyed every minute of it. Off you go, sailor. She could fix everything up, she could make a whole world shine for a sailorman, but she's not biting, because she just doesn't like sailors. O. K. Susie. Goodbye.

And away I go back towards my ship.

"Don't sprawl about, sailor," I tell myself, "for heaven's sake don't sprawl about. People'll think you're lost. Pull your coat collar up and get along. February's a cold month, hug yourself to yourself.

"One of these days I'll meet up with a decent Jane who'll marry me," I tell myself, "and all will be well then, yes, all will be well then, sailor."

KENNETH O. HANSON: *The Geometry of Heroes*

Odysseus
was the brother of improvidence, he
saw the day's red
rheumy eyes rise
felt the salt breeze
knew another shore
lay on the beach alone
among anemonae
brine covered before Nausikaa

was the brother of improvidence
knight errant
in a hard land where the syntax of an afternoon
demands Quixotic deeds
& craft
more devious than Odysseus'

O wise wanderer the faithless
pompous daring grave
impetuous courteous
kind & utterly vacuous Odysseus
Janus-fused with Munchausen
the delegation forms
to offer the reward
of a grateful people
for services rendered
you are the brief proprietor of a bar
trading
on a fiction & free lunch

this much for the mind as wide as a movie screen
whose shadows of experience shown
in Technicolor
are translations for the inarticulate

the mind is wide enough
for all deception
is itself deceived

the shape of truth is round
as an arena

or the sound of an old coin falling
through sea water

Remember those borne on the shoulders
of hypocrites
& the hero bound by brief attention
whose strong image is a boot on
the cobbled street
of the mind striking fire (& is this fire
less real
than cobblestones or sharp desire)
consider which is shadow
& which source
which image & which hero, tales
events remarks
rewards of a grateful people

Answers to problems long since solved
escape me

This is the familiar story
a sudden sorcery of wit in chromic language
used
to hide the guilty knowledge: other guts
have ached with this same rot
now in distinguished company
among the broken myths
you walk & still preserve the fiction

The hero
cries a desecration on the heads
of seamen never chronicled in Ithaca
well
cry a desecration now you're home
you were a fool
to leave the Sirens' song
if it was the song you say

still the question
is not one of belief or disbelief
truth or untruth
& the problem has been
defined whose answer is not hurried
if the shape of truth
is round
as an afternoon arena or a coin

where was it forgotten
in what place does it remain

This recapitulation of the dream
unsubtle signs
of relief, assignation by one mistaken
seems
superfluous grotesque
these thoughts on a deathless theme
threads from a threadbare sleeve
meditation
on an old tax token mean
acidulous protest
provide the implications
of the act & of the hero
here Odysseus.

What then is absolute but imprecations
one who curses the cut of his trousers
seldom
if ever knows that motley's rare wear for the fool

Odysseus
was the brother of improvidence
& scarcely hears
the ancient one at the upright piano
by the brass spittoon
who plays for beer
. . . O melancholy Baby . . .
one for whom
Clotho is become
an ordinary seamstress
whoring on the side
life has gone
to blue neon & jades

The shape of truth is round

perhaps I shouldn't ask
but where
is your Penelope tonight
why do you trade your tall tales
beautiful with someone's weaving
for this
& whatever became of Telemachus

Odysseus
borne by hypocrites assumes the endless debt

of inquisition
the reverse of the coin demands
a detail finer counterfeit more sure
& the
purple epithet of liar
is for him
who forged the world to his desire
who is at your elbow, owns a bar
& cannot be closed
like a door
or the pages of a book.

RUTH HERSCHBERGER:

"Poised between the two alarms . . ."

ROBERT PENN WARREN: *Selected Poems 1923-1943.* Harcourt, Brace.

This is a volume of collected poems by one of the best of living poets. Its first and longest section is of recent poems, the small and later section comprised of early poems. One could make many fanciful descriptive beginnings about the subject, content, and effect of these works. To the eye and ear of future centuries, the entire realm of modern poetry will possibly be known as the dream period, or—Dylan Thomas's poems—the underwater era in poetry. And Robert Penn Warren's poems are, I believe, chiefly of this dream tradition. The toxic or beguiling subconscious, the huge avenues of terror, the scintillating anxieties which Freud uncovered are represented here, more or less consciously. A previous volume of Warren's poetry, *Eleven Poems on the Same Theme,* is included; these poems draw at least one of their dominant themes from the impingement of the Past upon the present, the Past conceived in a Freudian way as persisting throughout one's lifetime, the years serving merely to fructify the fears we acquired as children.

The *then,* the *now:* each cenotaph
Of the other.

Cenotaph: a monument where no one is buried. This is the experience within the poems: elusive, terrible, but satisfying once one realizes the tomb is real, but that there is nothing within but shadows and half-imagined terrors. We are shown this slowly, with magnificent metaphor and knit meter, sometimes with a shock of unveiling, always with a profound wisdom of poetry and its richness. For an excellent poetry should enrich its content, though that content be terror and "emptiness." This is what Warren's poetry emphatically does.

Can we ever judge poems apart from what they say? Even the notion of "richly done," so wonderfully adverbial and seemingly referring to the poem-in-itself, has behind it a demand that poetic terror be animated by a metaphor of viable, animate things, that the life presented, even in a cenotaph, be full of "tidal lust," "protruding eye," "jaguar breath," and a "twinge of distress" which one, yes, can feel. These poems, vital with regret and rude with their knowledge of crime, will inevitably be judged against the experience of their readers; but since fear and anxiety are native to us all, they should resound assuredly. In pursuing our hypothesis on the content of the poems, one might say that beyond the presence of vigor and passionate mindfulness, what is lacking here is any overflowing, any exuberance. The overflow is one of rancor, an obsessive gayety when gay, a hunted exuberance; never sustaining an easy, humored, or pastoral mood.

It is this tautness, this tense alertness toward life, that makes all of us marvel at Warren's prosody. The wakeful-dream that penetrates the poems conveys itself to the meter as well. He lulls us with assonance, prods us with commas; his prosody is not for the indolent. The commas wonderfully studded ("Or are we dead, that we, unmanned, / Are vacant, and . . . "), the assonance and rhyme ("The amber light laved them, and us; / Or light then so untremulous") are enough to vanquish one with their strength and relaxed-tension, unless one is in a lively and capable mood.

All power to the Elizabethan richness and vigor of this poetry. It is good to hear boldly the "cold heart heaves like a toad," and to realize, sagely, of a hero—

> It is your custom to recline,
> Clutching between the forefinger and thumb
> Honor, *for death shy valentine.*

My italics. This is new knowledge of the profoundest sort, exciting and perpetual. Warren's themes are, I believe, loaded with the heightened mood of the Elizabethans, but chiefly of the post-Elizabethans, of John Webster, for instance, whose "friendless bodies of unburied men" reminds of the Warren theme, the half-live, half-dead past that persists and galls us all, the buried crime that refuses to stay buried.

> Of what is 't fools make such vain keeping?
> Sin their conception, their birth weeping,
> Their life a general mist of error,
> Their death a hideous storm of terror.

No lack of poetic genius here! Webster deserves his eminence. As does Robert Penn Warren, who sees

> All our debate is voiceless here,
> As all our rage, the rage of stone;
> If hope is hopeless, then fearless fear,
> And history is thus undone.

Magnificent, but with terror always present, all loveliness with its mildewed edge. Rose-buds and oaks may have their place in this poetry of The Terror, but we are swiftly dispossessed of any tendency to lean on their virtues. "All the flowers of the spring," says Webster, "Meet to perfume our burying." And Warren, too, has known flowers: "She blinks and croaks, like a toad or a Norn, in the horrible light, / And rattles her crutch, which may put forth a small bloom, perhaps white." The "wind-heaved gull . . . But question, not replies," the "green-lipped pool, / Or where moving waters sang / And algæ swayed beneath, / But thirsting and accurst— / Tongue black between the teeth / Whence no sweet spittle sprang—."

Why has the best of modern poetry adhered to a sombre and decaying view of existence? We have had a sad life, it is true, but there is an ideology that almost accidentally nurtured and is nurturing this outlook. Modern science, with all the cockiness of youth, took some delight in tearing apart the Faiths of the latter generation. Both God and Hope became mere metaphors, mere psycho-physiological expectations on the part of our helpless chemic frames. No one seemed to notice that Hume, way back in the 1700's, had shown that science, too, was built on probability and expectation, and that its imposing Cause and Effect were no more than figures of speech based on past actualities, and anticipating—rather fearfully—a future recurrence. The poets should then and there have insisted that metaphor and its evaluations were in the same class of reliability as science, and that poetry should not be ridiculed for the tenuousness of its subject matter. But the poets didn't fight back; they rushed frightened to the world of "things," and the moment they got there they erroneously saw their job as identical with that of the scientist or teacher. They believed they must pass judgment with extreme care, or the ethical balance of their generation might snap in two. They became moralists, and lesser poets, for their moralism was cautious, unimaginative, and *down-to-earth,* as the bourgeois call it. Keats is an exception, for his devotion to the Bards of Passion and of Mirth drove him on to a more daring combination of images than his stodgier brethren, Shelley and Wordsworth.

The poets felt their poems were accountable to science, and had to be built of nicely distinguishable blocks which could be knocked down and laid out for Scientific Inspection now and then. It was the ebullient Coleridge who had to take off so much time to give verbal justification for his poems. Wordsworth's congenial brooks and moralisms left him plenty of time for an effortless poesy. It is an accusation against the century that Wordsworth and his attitudes found such a comfortable berth within it, and Coleridge such a difficult one. But as

things stood, poetry *was* on the defensive, and metaphor was justifiable only in terms of "simplicity" and "soundness." Freud truly saved us from this, and though heirs of War and Depression, the modern poet ought to feel more grateful for the break that psychoanalysis gave him.

Science banned metaphor because it was equivocal, but Freud brought it back with his scientific justification of Ambivalence. Yet with Freud as the Muse, a sombre (and patriarchal) attitude toward life arose. The price of this reinstatement of poetry was that the poet must forever act the neurotic; only neurotics could turn to poetry and conceive any anxious evocative figure of speech. All serious poets, grateful to Freud for their liberation from a weak Tennysonian prison, gladly donned madman's rags or withdrew to a Childhood of deliverance. Affirmations returned, but they had to be of a special hue. Poetry went underground, so to speak. Its affirmations had to be buried ones, its glimpses of the upper world had to be through the shimmering distortion of water, its rejection of the present was carried out on strict Freudian grounds, and its "infantilisms" callously or tenderly exhibited. The poetry of Rilke, Eliot, Auden, Warren demonstrates the gamut and the vitality of this strange rebirth.

There are two modern poets strikingly different from this tradition: Whitman (c. 1855) and Hopkins (c. 1875). Whitman was an early bird, and resided in the rebellious country of Brooklyn; we can understand how he dared his pioneer exuberance. Hopkins was a rich being who escaped from the deadly Victorian moralism of the English countryside by joining the Jesuits. Within this continent faith, and when not morally occupied with translating Shakespeare's lyrics into more pietistic Latin, Hopkins wrote impudent English verse. "Wert thou my enemy, O thou my friend," he writes to the divine Providence, "How wouldst thou worse, I wonder, than thou dost / Defeat, thwart me?" Though the Church may claim him now, for all the world wants genius in its footnotes, the Institution that knew him did not particularly approve, nor did it adopt the patronizing tolerance of his "eccentricities" so common now. Hopkins' poetry was as much inhibited by his loyalty to God as it was inspired by it. Not only did metaphor suggest sensory pleasures and a Scotist particularity, there was also his guilty sense of affinity with the heretic Whitman. "I always knew in my heart," Hopkins wrote, "Walt Whitman's mind to be more like my own than any other man's living. As he is a very great scoundrel this is not a pleasant confession." And Hopkins endeavored to infect his poems with "a more Miltonic plainness and severity." Such radiant failure as his should encourage us all. How much more bacchic, in fact, are the fragments of "St. Winefred's Well" by Gerard Hopkins, S. J., than the dull paganism of Robert Bridge's "Feast of Bacchus."

The main point of this digression is to note that Robert Penn Warren's poetry is far from this world of Whitman's "Children of Adam" and Hopkins' praise of "All things counter, original, spare, strange"; Warren is well within the twentieth-century dream-milieu, haunted by the Past, Freudian or otherwise, and with no future or present to speak of. And while there is no

consistency of exuberance in Whitman and Hopkins in the sense that either of them struck a static pollyanna attitude toward life (consider "Out of the rolling ocean, the crowd," or "No worst, there is none"), there is, I believe, a consistent *denial* of exuberance in much of Warren's work. From my point of view, this is a criticism; others may defend it as the only attitude possible today.

One feels no sharp line between Warren's early and late poems. The early poems in some ways show more sharply the underlying themes of his poetry, for here already are "the blind and nameless bones," "the dry essential of tomorrow," the invocation to "keep the sweet sterility of stone," the "blind tides," "the bitter tendons of the stone," "the shuddering and sweat of stone." In fact, one of the earliest poems, "For a Self-Possessed Friend," outlines the very characteristics which Warren himself tended to leave behind in his poetry. What he indicts his friend for is an unwillingness to praise anything: "But you, my friend . . . you do not praise at all, / Or praising, stop and seem to cast your eye / Toward some commensurate cold finality. . . . " The speaker in the poem admits that he himself too often praises the worthless or the imperfect, but says, "It is an arrogance to save your breath," refusing to grant any praise at all. Among the thing over-praised by the speaker and others, we find listed:

> We praise the word, forget the deed;
> Praise furred gold leaves in April, not the seed
> Tissued of delicate blind agony.

I think it is fair to say that Warren's later poems find increasingly fewer things worthy of praise. To say that they praise the "sweet sterility of bone" is a left-handed comment, inasmuch as few persons would refer "praise" to the de-animation and rejection of life. We can admittedly refer *truth* to this, however.

Contrast is the marrow of poetry, and furred gold leaves with no knowledge of decay, blind agony, or their equivalent would be dull indeed. But at some moments in Warren's poetry one feels it is the blind agony that needs a contrast. This is one of those delicate "relative" matters, strictly bound to personal preference. The Elizabethans may have talked "Gather ye rosebuds while ye may" a great deal, but in the short time given them to gather, they enjoyed the live scent of the flowers. It was Webster who every moment saw the skull beneath the skin, and who probably felt that no sensitive poet should see anything else. For it is not that a defender of Terror asks the privilege of omitting the rosebuds and the furred gold leaves from his own poems; he more often (in esthetic judgments) denies any "truth" to the buds and leaves in other writers. The poet has as strong tendencies to regiment as anyone else. At any rate, my regret for the lack of exuberance in Warren's poetry, while admittedly preferential, is nonetheless an esthetic criticism of lack of contrast, and not a denial of the truth of the Terror, nor a moral jibe at "morbidity," nor a wish to speak for other readers.

Warren's chief concepts are hinted at in the frequent use of arrogant, bitter, lean, bone, terror, innocence, stone, Time, and so on. The curious inclusion

of innocence can but equivocally be explained. "Time is innocence," but one can "Weary of innocence and the husks of Time."

> For the beginning is death and the end may be life,
> For the beginning was definition and the end may be definition,
> And our innocence needs, perhaps, new definition. . . .

The new definition, one gleans, will be "frail as the clasped dream beneath the blanket's wool," a mocking attainment. In general, the escape from terror and past guilt (once indicated as "fault not our own") is into stone, "lapped in the arrogant chastity of our desire," "voiceless," for "purity was wordless." While summer has hopes and gold leaves, it is winter for Warren that has knowledge: "Summer's wishes, winter's wisdom." This, I believe, is a fair statement of Warren's predominant theme, the vulgar buzzard-nature of this life countered not by a voluptuous escape into death, but by a new "definition," a "secret," somewhat cerebral in conception, or by conversion into bone and stone. The poet stands "poised between the two alarms / Of summer's lusts and winter's harms," where "weakness has become our strength, / And strength, confused, can but reject / Its object . . . " It is hard not to react somewhat morally, even politically, to the pervasive notion that a "confused" strength must invariably reject its object, suspend judgment, one presumes, and that it is satisfied to call its weakness strength. But one resists.

The most recent poem, "The Ballad of Billie Potts," is excellently done. Its dramatic construction has a very curious emotional factor: drama typically has a sympathetic character, a person who is put-upon undeservedly and whose virtues we are happy to suppose our own, through their honest goodness or fine sensibility. In order to "care," we must feel an identification. The Ballad begins with Big Billie Potts and his wife; Big Billie may be a rat and a murderer, but there is something boisterous and clever about him; he "could smell the nest where the egg was laid . . . in the land between the rivers." The author seems benevolent up to the point of Little Billie's introduction. Even aside from the "piss and vinegar" in Little Billie, he is disgustingly stupid and insensitive. Strong malice enters the account here. And along with the presence of this ugly mortal, Little Billie, there is an iterated chorus-effect, the emotions of you and you and the author, finely and sensitively written, produced in parentheses now and then, which forces us relentlessly to identify ourselves with the disgusting Billie! The neurotic conflict this sets up in the reader is certain to behold. The sensitive reflections of the chorus (or commentator) are immediately paralleled by similar but repellent emotions in Little Billie. For example, when we in the chorus are hypnotically hearing "There is always another country and always another place. . . . ," we are brought up against the fact that Little Billie is at that moment going west . . . The self-laceration, not to say self-degradation, this identification promotes in the reader is, I think, a powerful certainty. And again one must decide whether this helps or hinders the impact of the tale. It is a considerable feat to persuade us to *feel for* Little Billie at the same time that he repels us.

Even if April gets only a small showing, and autumn a big one, the imagery in these *Selected Poems* is strong and effective. Even if the birds going south have as little escape from winter's cruel wisdom as the rest of us, the conception is brave and the image fine:

> The grackles, yellow-beaked, beak-southward, fly
> To the ruined ricelands south, leaving empty our sky.

And what more melodious horror could one find than "Slack dugs by the dry thorn torn"; what more impressive view of death:

> . . . a womb more tender than her own
> That builds not tissue or the little bone,
> But dissolves them to itself in weariness.

Or wryer humor:

> When in the midnight's pause I mark
> The breath beside me in the dark,
> And know that breath's a clock, and know
> That breath's the clock that's never slow,
> *Timor mortis conturbat me.*

I have surely exaggerated the "morbidity" of Warren's themes; there is more tenderness and human insight than has been indicated. The scattered quotations remain the best witness to the warmth and vitality of these *Selected Poems;* for the book as a whole sustains this impression of richness and deep sensibility.

MARJORIE BRACE:

Worshipping Solid Objects: The Pagan World of Virginia Woolf

VIRGINIA WOOLF: *A Haunted House.* Harcourt, Brace.

In an essay titled "The Traveller's-Eye View" Aldous Huxley refers to some writers who "exploit the spectator's emotion": "The most uninteresting human being, seen at a little distance by a spectator with a lively fancy takes on a mysterious charm, becomes odd and exciting. One can work up a thrilling emotion about distant and unknown people—an emotion impossible to recapture after acquaintance, but which yields place to understanding." Certain authors, however, gain their effect precisely by never trying to understand. "The

mysterious charm of Joseph Conrad's characters is due to the fact that he knows nothing at all about them. He sits at a distance, he watches them acting and then wonders and wonders . . . what were their motives, what they felt and thought. . . . His bewilderment is infectious; the reader is just as hopelessly puzzled and finds the characters just as wonderfully mysterious." Katherine Mansfield, on the other hand, "invents suitable lives for the fabulous creatures glimpsed at cafés—and how thrilling those fancied lives always are! . . . Her characters are seen with extraordinary brilliance and precision, as one sees a party of people in a lighted drawing-room at night, through a window, haloed with significance . . . The glimpse of the inhabitants sipping their tea is enormously exciting, but one knows nothing, when one has passed, of what they are really like." Huxley concludes by remarking that there will always be mysteries because there will always be unknown things. "But it is best to know what is knowable. To know, one must be an actor as well as a spectator. One must dine at home as well as in restaurants, must give up the game of peeping in windows to live quietly unexcitedly indoors."

I have quoted at such length from this essay because I think its theme may have further development and implication in the work of other writers. The serious writers of the twenties were very conscious of living in an age of transition, bereft of any desirable order of values; very aware of living breathlessly in motion, in time, without roots. Psychologically speaking, they had no home for quiet living. Alone and unsupported on an unfathomable journey, their personal lives were as if confined to hotel rooms. They were spectators in every sense, observing not only other people, but themselves, with that traveller's eye which perceives nothing but gesture. Emotions—and, above all, relations with others—were seen through lighted windows as dramatic postures, and so became false. To "understand" the human character became more and more impossible, not through ignorance or superficiality or love for mystery, but because on that disintegrating journey in which no fixed standard of judgment could endure, it was absolutely what was *unknowable.*

To Virginia Woolf the unknowableness of people and the impossibilities of communion were never, as to some of her contemporaries, comic or ironic or of intellectual interest, but terrifying. The devices others used for evading genuine characterization, the "scientific" analyses, the violent caricatures, the self-conscious satirical melancholy posturing, all these were repulsive to her serious and lyrical nature. That responsiveness to what was truly alive which, in her literary essays, emerged in such tender appreciations of personalities from a warmer past, left her shivering but determined before the cold looming problems of her own time. Like one of the insects she loved to describe, we see her progressing erratically through her novels, feeling, as with painfully sensitive antennæ along a chilly wall, for some new approach to the mystery. With each novel, the characters become more shadowy and we have in their stead, almost alarmingly real—as large as life and twice as natural—seasons, boats, oceans, leaves, furniture; the very streams of consciousness, when not a highly lyrical poetry, sound like overheard conversations or the confessions a stranger

might impart on a train. And in *A Haunted House,* her collected short stories, —some of them left unrevised at her death, some, even in final form, mere sketches—there is a kind of unity the novels, for all their elaboration, never achieved: the traveller's view has perhaps never been expressed with such purity, in all its super-vividness of seeing and hearing, its rocket-like bursts of excitement, its flat returns to the hotel room of the self.

Here is a reiterated motif of human departure from the haunted "houses" of the past: "They wanted to leave this house because they wanted to change their style of furniture, so he said . . . very interesting people because one will never see them again, never know what happened next . . . we were torn asunder, as one is torn from the old lady about to pour out tea and the young man about to hit the tennis ball in the back garden of the suburban villa as one rushes past in the train. . . . Why, if one wants to compare life to anything it is being blown through the Tube at fifty miles an hour, with one's hair flying back like the tail of a race-horse." Reality is something glimpsed as one tears past, something arrested, timeless; is a flower-stalk or the old lady about to pour tea.

But the old lady lives only in a picture. She is not "understood," she has no capacity for action other than to complete a gesture, and she fades like a landscape from our sight, her living and dying of obviously less significance to a traveller than the decay of her house or garden. This world in which old ladies may be equivalent in value to the weather or snails on a rock, while unquestionably it has uncovered new areas of awareness, has also brought fresh terror to individual experience, beside which the spectator's joy is seen dwindling to a nervous, transient release. In such a story as "An Unwritten Novel" the narrator, observing a tragic face on a train, invents a withered spinster's life story to suit it, only to have the fancy exploded when the "character" is met at the station by a son. And what is the reaction? "Well, my world's done for! What do I stand on? What do I know? Who am I? Life's bare as a bone." But almost at once (still aboard the train and not back in the hotel room) the last look "flooded her anew. Mysterious figures! Who are you? Where tonight will you sleep? . . . unknown figures, you I adore; if I open my arms it's you I embrace—adorable world!"

The note of hysteria is unmistakable: the traveller's intoxicating sense of illegitimate freedom is darkened by inevitable returns to a somehow equally spurious "reality," subjective as well as objective, where, alone and looking at himself, he is compelled to dissolve his *own* capacity for action by self-mockery: "I wish I could hit upon a pleasant track of thought, indirectly reflecting credit on myself . . . Dressing up the figure of myself in my own mind, stealthily, not openly adoring it, for if I did that I should catch myself out . . . "

Virginia Woolf is least interesting when, defending, as it were, this powerless condition, she presents as the only possible foil the stock culprit of so many novels of the period: the ignoble person who has not the grace to realize his own self-imprisonment. Such are the humanitarians in "The Man Who Loved His Kind" who, anxious to prove their own way of loving humanity to be the only

right one, end up by hating everybody. Similarly, there is the girl in "The New Dress" whose costume, designed to be exotic, appears only laughably eccentric to her once she arrives at a party where she is doomed to be either snubbed or bored because— we grasp the point only too quickly—her own unreflecting egotism turns all dresses and parties drab. We have met this girl too often before. We have been informed by too many writers that we *are* that girl, that, always taking ourselves to parties, we miss the thrills of observation through a lighted window.

We do not question the Baudelarian horrors of existence so poisoned by subjectivity that even the ocean speaks "un langage connu." What we do question is the finality of the either-or implication. Is it not just this artificial pendulum-swing between human falseness and an inhuman world of "mysterious figures" that adulterates such writing with a morally dubious quality? Is it not just as untenable and, even, smug, to be forever appreciative of our "honesty" and thrilled with the unknown?

Virginia Woolf's work never resolved this issue, but when it was confronted, as in her story "Solid Objects," she created some of the most remarkable symbolic expressions of our time. Here is John, standing for Parliament—that is all we are told about him—who one day at the beach finds a lump of green glass so mysteriously significant that he begins hunting everywhere for similar objects for his mantel. "They were useful," Virginia Woolf tells us slÿly, "for a man upon the brink of a brilliant career has any number of papers to keep in order—addresses to constituents, declarations of policy, appeals for subscriptions. . . . " Soon he finds a fragment of china so extraordinary that he misses a meeting trying to fish it from an obscure recess. "Set opposite the lump of glass it looked a creature from another world—freakish and fantastic as a harlequin. The contrast between the china so vivid and alert, and the glass so mute and contemplative, fascinated him." He begins to haunt wastelands, rubbish heaps, demolished houses, neglects everything in the search, and the day he is not elected finds him elate, for he has discovered "a most remarkable piece of iron, massy and globular, but so cold and heavy, so black and metallic, that it was evidently alien to the earth and had its origin in one of the dead stars or was itself the cinder of a moon. And yet it stood upon the same ledge with the lump of glass and the star-shaped china."

In this apparent negation of all human values, we find a partial and—in its very inadequacy—a desperate, almost noble attempt to re-invoke them on some unapproached plane. The documents, leading articles, cabinet ministers—that reality which made Virginia Woolf exclaim, "The military sound of the word is enough!"—these things had become so profoundly inimical to the interests of the other, inner reality (in turn horrified by its own isolation) that the two realities cancelled each other out. There was nothing but to establish entirely new relations as, waking from a nightmare, "one turns on the light and lies worshipping the chest of drawers, worshipping solidity, worshipping the impersonal world which is a proof of some existence other than ours. That is what one must be sure of."

An excess of moral sensibility and humaneness caused Virginia Woolf to move into an inhuman and morally irresponsible world, making her write of insects, trees, old boards and broken china as if they were inhabited in an ancient sense by gods and spirits. She was trying to shift perspective, to start all over again, by creating in the unconscious some life-giving pagan emotion which, roving through the detritus of civilization, might also move into relation with a chemical, mineral, biological, fourth-dimensional universe, and so toward a new morality.

The virtue of the specator's view is that, tearing down houses and disrupting dead relationships, it helps this fresh start. Its defect is that no matter how great the artist's moral anxiety and sensibility, it makes quite hopeless those human relations the difficulty of which sent him on his travels at the beginning. That is why, in almost all the novelists of the transitional group, definite or memorable characters are sacrificed to the qualities of things which should be distinct from literature, such as psychology, or music or painting. But the truth of a psychological analysis, the significance in a musical theme or a picture is complete and not, as great literature is, implicit with potential action. More successfully than any prose writer of her time, Virginia Woolf was, with words, a musician and a painter. What she was not can be seen in comparison with the few who, working with her material and intention, were not dazzled by a new conception of time, but lived densely within it; who placed human beings in new relations with each other as well as with the physical world.

This is so of Proust, whose wealth of color and object is not seen through a window, for all its brilliance, but crowds upon us; through all the subtle change and mingling of his novel the great characters seem to flower amid the trees and founder majestically among the decaying houses and documents. And if Proust introduced new meanings for time and space, Joyce entered a new moral dimension. In his utter dispersion of the elements of character and his reintegration of them in the unique figure of Bloom, Joyce suggested a possible humanization of those complex and desolating perceptions which de-populated the world of Virginia Woolf of all but ghosts and drove her toward a pagan re-animation of objects.

But it is she who seems closer to us now, and prophetic. The martial sound of reality and the clashes of malformed egos have invaded the landscape as well as the midnight room with cold ferocity. We are reminded as we read her that journeys now have grimmer purposes, that the traveller no longer stops at those marvelous way-stations, those heavenly coté d'Azurs she explored so exquisitely. The general motivation of current fiction recalls those base persons whose lack of self-knowledge she repudiated with fastidious disgust. If we cavil at her writing like a painter, how are we to endure those novelists whose work, under such an analogy, could only be compared with some curious Landseer school, populated with people like vicious or noble dogs? who do not even comprehend the questions left unanswered by a previous literary generation? To be surrounded with what is dying, and to know it, is better than to mistake death for life.

From this perspective we look back at Leopold Bloom standing as on some distant peak, the last fully human man in literature. We cannot help, as we open Virginia Woolf's books, climbing on her train with something of her own desperate joy. Despite our completed knowledge of the life bare as a bone at the journey's end, the rushing air is so alive, so cold and salty with the sea, so warm with flowering vines; and there is also the amazing piece of iron, solid and concentrated, to hold like a talisman in our hands.

ROBERT PENN WARREN:

E. E. CUMMINGS: *1 x 1.* Henry Holt.

After reading *One Times One,* and enjoying it very much, I turned back to *Tulips and Chimneys,* which inaugurated the career of Mr. Cummings some twenty years ago, when the author was about thirty years old. In that early book we can see in a purer form the elements which in later work have been drawn into more elaborate combinations and fused under greater pressures. We may divide these elements into two groups, about what we may call the two poles of Cummings' work, one the pole of the "'soft," the other that of the "hard." About the first are grouped the "sweet-sweet" and the "lush," the delicate poeticalities and sensitivities. For the sweet-sweet:

it's
spring
and
the
goat-footed

balloonMan whistles
far
and
wee

For the lush:

a
worshipper
prostrate within twitching shadows
lolls

sobbing

with lust.

About the second pole are grouped the "cute," the realistic, the trivial, the whimsical. We remember that a sonnet began with the line,

"kitty".sixteen 5′ 1″, white, prostitute;

that the Cambridge ladies "live in furnished souls"; that the girl lying on the curbstone said,

i'm

so
drunG

k, dear.

But somewhere in between these two poles, there was, even in *Tulips and Chimneys,* some poetry to which now, after two decades, we can return.

The poetry involves elements drawn from both extreme groups, from both poles, but the elements, when they enter into Cummings' real poetry, have been transformed: the cute has become satire, and the sweet-sweet has become lyric. In both instances the same basic process takes place: the excessive self-consciousness is lost, the mode (cuteness or sweetness) finds some matter to work on, the poet gets a subject different from the subject of his own poetic sensitivity and the wit gets a subject different from the subject of his own wittiness. When the poetry has been good, it has involved elements drawn from both of the poles, but it has not presented these elements in terms of the simple effects of the examples just quoted.

But even now, in *One Times One,* we can still see some of the elements in a relatively pure state, that is, undigested into poetry. Especially we can see the sweet-sweet and the cute. Sweet-sweet:

> we love each other very dearly
> , more
> than raindrops need sunbeams or snowflakes make
> possible mayflowers:

or:

> whose moving is more april than the year
> (if all her most first little flowers rise
>
> out of tremendous darkness into air)

Cute:

> applaws)
>
> "fell
> ow
> sit
> isn'ts"
>
> (a paws

And frequently we find a use of language which is vague and sometimes portentous and insistent. And we find sometimes, as earlier, the arbitrary devices of lining, punctuation, capitalization, etc. But in the volume there is a gratifyingly high percentage of Cummings' best work.

The best work now has shifted in temper from the temper of the period of *Is Five.* In that volume the best work was characteristically satirical, brilliant visualizations, painful little ironies, parodies of vulgarity or brutality. Here we still find something of the same satirical spirit, but with the exception of two pieces (numbers XII and XIII) its manifestations are rather trivial or flat. The distinction in this volume lies in the lyrical pieces, pieces which may well be the best poems of Cummings and among the best lyrics of our time.

Two or three of these new lyrics represent an extension of the strain which was common in the earlier work, the simple celebration of a springtime delicacy and joy. But in several of these (especially in number LI), we find that the poet has developed rhythmical resources which his typographical trickeries had usually precluded. That is, he is now considering the ear rather than the eye; and the change is all to the good. Though the type of poem to which I have just referred has two or three excellent examples in this volume, the finest lyrics (numbers III, XVI, XVIII, XX, XXXIX) have a new density, a speculative strain, a subject.

And this last remarks leads me to a generalization. I am inclined to think that the problem for Cummings has always been to find a subject. For the most part, his poetry has been a poetry of atmosphere, of temperament. It has been a poetry of fleeting evocations, glimpses, evanescent impressions, glancing comments. The reader has often come away with a vivid sense of the personality of the poet, and even of the world of the poet, or at least of the atmosphere of that world; but he has rarely come away with a poem that stuck in his head. He can remember what one of the poems felt like, but not what it was, or at least not precisely. The poems have celebrated a temperament, have, as it were, given a portrait of a special poet—the tough-sensitive poet in a beautiful-ugly world. It is the poet sitting in the city bar, bemused by the sharp juxtaposition of things:

i ask of shad-
ow won't you have a drink?

(the eternal perpetual question)

Inside snugandevil. i was sitting in mcsorley's
It, did not answer.

outside. (it was New York and beautifully snowing . . .

But in general the poems have not had a subject, a topic of discourse, and not having a subject they have lacked a principle of organization and progression. There has usually been the flash, the comment, the turn, but not what the poet has professed to be so fond of, "that precision which creates movement." We should not, however, complain too bitterly that in the past this poet has not often given us what he wanted to give; for he has given us something else which we value. And now, in the lyrics, he is giving the precision and the movement, too.

AUSTIN WARREN:

HORACE GREGORY: *The Shield of Achilles: Essays on Belief in Poetry.* Harcourt, Brace.

This is not the review I expected to write, for Gregory's book disappointed my expectations. I knew his criticism from *Pilgrim of the Apocalypse,* a "sensitive and discerning" little book on Lawrence, and an essay in re-appraisal of Poe which appeared in the exciting context of the *Partisan Review,* and which (probably the best essay) is included in this collection.

Likely all of the fifteen essays would read better taken one by one, at intervals. Collectively, they are at once "thin" and cloying. For their subjects they take English and American authors, chiefly poets. With the exception of Dr. Johnson, they are figures of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; and the time-center is the romantic movement. (Landor, Byron, Beddoes, Poe). The collection opens with Johnson and closes with Paul Elmer More, thus safeguarding the reader from the romantics within or illustrating the critic's catholicity.

It is difficult to remember what Gregory says on most of his people; it is generally "intelligent," familiar, diffusely uttered, bland. Mrs. Woolf and Dr. Williams are made to sound not too dissimilar,—for they are both fine, cultured spirits, and so is Dr. More. These "appreciations" deal gently with both the failures and the aggressions of the authors. Finally girding his loins, Gregory votes for "humanism" rather than "humanitarianism"—or registers that Time is going to vote so; but he is much too tender a soul to make a good Humanist.

Like a party platform, Gregory's theoretical statements aim at displeasing no voters. I seem to remember Gregory as a distinguished leftist; there is, however, no leftist note in this book; characteristically, not even a recantation or a gibe. But otherwise the motto seems to be: "There's good in all the churches"; all lines of thought are helpful if you don't push them too far (the gilt mean); but you mustn't get out on a limb. For example: "Poe touches depths of psychological reality that have been distorted or ignored by those who have attempted to explain his character by a facile use of Freudian analysis." By implication, all psychoanalysis is "facile," especially as this is the book's single reference to Freud.

Apparently Gregory feels no need to reconcile his figures (Lawrence and More and Poe) or to provide any criteria for judging their personalities, their attitudes and doctrines, or their work. He might have presented each empathically, self-interpreted; or he might have attempted some philosophical reconstruction of literary history, defining the positive and negative values of neoclassicism, romanticism, and realism. But he does neither. He assumes that his taste and

temperament will adequately unify the essays; and that the eirenic intention can take the place of a theory of literature.

He doubtless thinks of himself as writing essays like More's Shelburnes—so urbane and detached from the strife of tongues; but they lack the moral intensity of More's best. Gregory is reminiscent rather of the English essayist-critics like Quiller-Couch, de Selincourt, F. L. Lucas, H. W. Garrod,—critics proud of their amateur status and tone, or of a Lowell of less learning and wit. The advances of Anglo-American criticism initiated by Eliot are quietly ignored. Perhaps the assumption is that our public has tired of polemic and technical criticism (*e.g.*, Richards, Ransom, Burke, Winters) and is ready to welcome some address to the Common Reader. In any case, this is not criticism for critics or writers.

The subtitle, "Essays on Beliefs in Poetry," is somewhat of a puzzler; and the timid "Foreword" doesn't much assist. Gregory speaks of taking the "chances of seeming to stress a moral attitude in regard to literature." Does he mean to stress, or only fear that he will seem to stress, a moral attitude? And is the "moral attitude" the same as a "belief in Poetry"? Gregory uses terms loosely and unsystematically. There are occasional confused sentences on the relation of philosophy to poetry, on the use of "ideas" in poetry. They amount, however, to no more than the assertion, which no rival critic would challenge, that poems express attitudes toward life. The last page of his "whimsical" essay on Wordsworth's *Ode* is as ambitious as Gregory's theory gets. In its blurred language and its endeavor to sound as though it were saying something important, it is such an exhibition of the "literary mind" as Eastman or some good positivist brother would delight to find.

Gregory has, in effect, revived the old-fashioned sort of "literary" essay which combines some biographical information and analysis of the author's psyche with some never too heavy comment on the writings, comment moving from the writer's "style" to his "ideas" and back again. These are "talks about books."

The prose style is symptomatic in its trite, smooth phrasing and graciously concessive transitions. "Mrs. Woolf is at her happiest as she recaptures a moment of the eighteenth century viewed always in the light of her own day." "Someone has spoken—it does not matter who, for no doubt many others have made the same observation—of the delightful urbanity of the prose which graces the early *Shelburne Essays.*" For passage-work, take these: "but it must be confessed that *Gebir* . . . " ; "Wordsworth, I fear . . . " ; 'As one reads further into Landor's shorter poems . . . " ; "It may seem gratuitous to remark that . . . " ; "I happen to believe that . . . " ; "it should be said plainly that . . . " The insolence of Yvor Winters is easier to take than his gentlemanly palaver.

The best essays deal with the romantics,—Byron, Beddoes, and Poe; and Gregory comes nearest to penetration in scattered remarks psychiatrically analyzing these men and what survives in their work. Edmund Wilson's essays on Housman, Dickens, and Kipling, or, in more academic kind, E. B. C. Watkins' essays on Swift and Johnson, suggest the kind of study to which Gregory's talent would seem to direct him.